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TIGER DICK, THE MAN OF THE IRON HEART; or, THE DUMB BANDIT. AN EPISODE OF FREEZE-OUT CAMP.

BY PHILIP S. WARNE,

AUTHOR OF "THE GENTLEMAN FROM PIKE," "A MAN OF NERVE," "ALWAYS ON HAND," "TIGER DICK, THE FARO KING," ETC., ETC.



"HUNT IN HIS POCKETS FOR THE KEY TO THESE CURSED BRACELETS!" COMMANDED TIGER DICK.

Tiger Dick,

The Man of the Iron Heart;

OR,

THE DUMB BANDIT.

An Episode of Freeze-out Camp.

BY PHILIP S. WARNE,

AUTHOR OF "ALWAYS ON HAND," "A HARD

CROWD," "THE GENTLEMAN FROM PIKE,"

"CAPTAIN MASK," "CAPTAIN ARIZONA,"

"DESPARD, THE DUEL-

IST," "PATENT-LEATHER

JOE," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A BOLD BLOW FOR LIBERTY.

"UGH! This is a regular bake-oven! A-a-w!" And Jim Farnsworth, the Frisco sheriff, yawned almost to the point of dislocating his jaw.

"Keep cool, my dear Jim!" laughed the prisoner, Tiger Dick. "This isn't a circumstance to what I anticipate at no distant day."

"Rather sleepily, yet with a certain admiring interest—for 'cl'ar grit" commands respect the world over—Jim Farnsworth looked at the man who could jest thus lightly "with his neck in the halter."

"Dick," he said, "you're the coolest fellow I ever handled. It's a pity to spoil such stuff as you've got in you."

"And yet you'll do your level best to swing me?"

"And succeed, too, you bet!"

"Thank you!"—dryly.

"No malice, Dick?"

"Not the least in the world, my dear Jim. I go my pile on a bluff; you see me, show up, and rake the board. That's square!"

And, as if this journey to the gallows were a mere pleasure trip, the Tiger began to whistle.

"Hold on, Dick!" protested deputy Bragg, trying to get in a more comfortable position for a nap. "I don't want to interfere with your amusement."

"Seeing that my time is so limited—eh, pardner?"

"Exactly. But try to make yourself easy, like the rest of us—there's a good fellow."

The driver looked round with a grin, voting this cool trio "devilish queer fish;" but he was used to meeting men who held their lives as lightly as they did their gold-dust; and, yielding to the soporific influence of the noonday sun, his grin and his interest died out together. His spasmodic jerk on the reins and mechanical "Ge-up!" were too purposeless to rouse his jaded horses from their languid, shambling walk.

Man, nor beast, nor even nature could withstand the sweltering sun. Not a breath of air stirred. The leaves hung dead. No cloud relieved the monotony of the dull, grayish-blue sky.

Tiger Dick looked ahead over the red, sandy road—around on the sparsely-wooded glen with its jagged horizon defined by peaks, some of them snow-capped—lastly at his dozing companions.

On his right sat Jim Farnsworth—a man with a keen black eye, a firm lip, an iron grip, and a courage which nothing on earth could daunt. Once on the trail of an offender against the law, he followed him to the death, with blood-bound pertinacity. So had he tracked the Tiger across a continent, and "treed him at last, thousands of miles away," in the States.

On the front seat deputy Bragg, a man of bull-dog strength and boldness, was curled up in a position of very questionable comfort. That his heavy revolver might not interpose between his back and the seat, it was drawn round to the front.

The driver, Comanche Bob, was a fellow with the name and roar of a lion, and—the heart of a mouse—a type of man not altogether unknown in the mountain country.

Lastly, Tiger Dick, with the physique of an Apollo, unworthily tenanted by a spirit in which unbridled passions ran riot.

Not by the sweat of his brow had the Tiger expiated the penalty incurred by fallen humanity. No work more grievous than shuffling "the devil's bible" had ever chafed his shapely white hands. Now they were restrained from further mischief by a pair of handcuffs, which he viewed with a sneer, half-fierce, half-mocking.

A moment the eyes of the Tiger glittered with a suddenly-formed purpose, as they took in the whole situation. Then the white lids closed, his muscles relaxed, his breath came in long, regular respirations, and he seemed to sleep as sweetly as a care-free child.

Yet this was a moment of terrible danger. Every faculty of the seemingly-sleeping prisoner was on the alert. While he rested so motionless, his ear drank in and interpreted every sound.

He knew when Jim Farnsworth recovered with a start from a partial doze, glanced sleepily around, and settled back into an easy pos-

ture. He heard the faintest perceptible snore from deputy Bragg's seat. Then Farnsworth's breathing became heavy and regular. His hand slipped from his lap without rousing him.

The Tiger's eyelids quivered, then opened the least thread.

A single, careless glance at the somnolent driver.

A gloating, ferocious, hungry stare at deputy Bragg's unguarded revolver.

Slowly, like creeping panthers, the eyes turn in Jim Farnsworth's direction.

Like a flash of light they leap suddenly wide open!

Now must the guardian angel of stout Jim Farnsworth be crying into his drowsy ears:

"Awake! awake! for death is in the air! Shake off the traitor sleep! The vigilance of months is brought to naught by one moment of false security!"

He hears not—he heeds not!

With a yell of almost insane exultation, of devilish triumph, of savage fury, Tiger Dick—ah! how well named!—swoops upon the exposed revolver of the sleeping deputy. Like the working of a piece of mechanism, his manacled hands snatch and cock the deadly weapon, and he whirls upon the man whom he has most cause to fear.

Not an instant are the wits of vigilant Jim Farnsworth wool gathering. He springs at once, from sleep into complete wakefulness. Before he had time to see the danger, he comprehends what is coming.

No waste of precious time in the futile attempt to draw his own weapon. He springs up and seeks to seize his prisoner, trusting to his vise-like gripe.

Too late!

Tiger Dick's voice rings forth in clarion tones:—

"Your life or mine, Jim Farnsworth! DIE!"

A ringing report—

A puff of white smoke that envelops Jim Farnsworth's face, veiling the look with which that dauntless soul gazes upon death—

A cry of mortal anguish, cut short with an abruptness which is awfully significant.

The hands are tossed aloft; the body topples backward out of the vehicle, to strike the ground with the dull thud of an inert, lifeless clod!

One moment of stupid bewilderment intervenes between deputy Bragg's fatal sleep and the death which extinguishes his life like the snuff of a candle.

A gasp—a quiver—and he lies still!

The deed was done. Tiger Dick stood erect, master of the field.

Mechanically reining in his startled horses, Comanche Bob twisted his white face over his shoulder, to witness a spectacle which turned his craven blood to water.

But judge him not harshly. Few men could have looked unmoved upon the Medusa-like face of the Tiger, in that terrible moment when his life hung in the balance against those of his captors.

The maniac glitter of his piercing eyes—the quivering nostrils—the teeth gleaming white beneath his raven mustache! Again, well-named was the Tiger!

But Comanche Bob witnessed a transition, even more terrible as the tense muscles relaxed into an icy smile, and the raging demon lapsed into the mocking devil.

"Sweet Robert," said the Tiger, in his wonted cool, bantering tones, "a word of advice which you may find useful in the next world. *Never throw up your hand till the last card is played!*"

"Another thing:—*Never allow yourself the petty indulgence of narrow-minded animosity.* Do you think that there was any hostility between me and these gentlemen, whom the exigencies of the desperate game we were playing compelled me to remove from the trials and temptations of a wicked world? Far from it, my dear Robert! It was their game to swing me; it was my game not to be swung, if I could help it. You witnessed the perfect civility which existed between us. They played their hands like gentlemen. Unfortunately for them—*fortunately* for me—they, as is not infrequently the case, grew over-confident, feeling that the game was all in their own hands, and relaxed their vigilance. I watched my chance, played my little joker, and, behold a euchre!"

"I believe I have no further use for you, Robert; and, to be frank, I'm rather choice of my associates. So—*git ready to git!*"

"Hold on, gov'nor!" cried Comanche, in a quavering voice, altogether out of keeping with his formidable "handle." "I hain't never done nothin' to you; an' I allow this hyar b'ilin' ain't none o' my funeral. I'm paid fur drivin', I am; an' you bet I ain't throwin' in no extras. The game's between you an' them galoots. That's what *they're* paid fur. I don't see your ante, boss. I pass out!"

"Throw away your revolver!" commanded the Tiger, with a show of contemptuous impatience. "Such a coward as you don't deserve to carry a white man's weapon!"

"All right, Mr. Tiger Dick!" acquiesced the redoubtable Comanche, with effusive com-

plaisance. "Your a-runnin' of this hyar machine; so, over she goes!"

"Stop those horses!"

"Whoa-up thar!"

"Get down out of this!"

"Git it is!"

And the driver jumped from his seat with alacrity.

Tiger Dick followed to the ground.

"March!" he commanded, pointing back over the road.

"Ye needn't p'int that thar weapon this hyar way no more'n ye kin help, boss," pleaded Comanche Bob, with no abatement of uneasiness, as he moved forward. "I ain't a hog; an' I don't want nothin' what don't b'long to me—leastways in the cold lead line, you bet!"

"Back-talk always makes my finger unsteady, Robert," cautioned the Tiger, meaningly; "and I should hate to plug you *by accident*—I should so!"

From that moment Comanche Bob observed a Sphinx-like silence, except when directly addressed.

"Halt!" commanded the Tiger when they came to where luckless Jim Farnsworth lay at the roadside.

Comanche stopped as if shot.

"See if that man is dead."

"Dead as a post, with a bullet through his topknot," reported the impromptu surgeon, after a hurried examination of the fallen man's wound.

"Hunt in his pockets for the key to these 'cursed bracelets!"

Comanche Bob began a fumbling search.

At that moment a succession of dull thuds reached Tiger Dick's fine ear, bringing a quick look of apprehension into his eyes, as he glanced down the road.

"Do you find the key?" he called, sharply.

"Not yet, boss! Reckon it's in hyar!"

And Comanche dove into another pocket with nervous haste.

The whinny of a horse sounded shrill and clear.

Several mounted men came round a bend in the road.

"The key!—the key!" cried the Tiger.

"Yes, boss!—yes!" gasped Comanche Bob, a cold sweat starting from every pore in his body.

The leading horseman directed the attention of his comrades to the unusual scene upon which they had come; a few basty words were exchanged; and with a shout the party spurred forward.

Tiger Dick's face set in the icy smile with which he always met danger—the smile of the glittering eye and teeth gleaming white beneath his jet mustache.

"Sweet Robert," he said, in honeyed accents, "you're too slow. Excuse me; but I find myself under the painful necessity of putting a quietus on you, lest you find Jim Farnsworth's revolver more accessible than his keys, and play me a scurvy trick the moment my back is turned. Robert, good-by!"

The now ghastly Comanche half rose, lifting his hands appealingly.

"Pardner—honor bright!" he gasped.

The revolver of the implacable Tiger rose into line. A report—a puff of smoke!

"My God! I'm a—dead—"

Comanche Bob "passed out!"

Not in the headlong flight for dear life when fear wings the feet and the panic-stricken soul forgets all else in the one blind impulse to carry its quailing tenement beyond the clutch of death, but like the trained athlete, sped the still-manacled Tiger back to the horses on whom now hung the life and liberty for which he had so desperately fought; while with yells of horror and resentful rage his pursuers pressed hotly after.

CHAPTER II.

AT FEARFUL ODDS.

WITH lightning dexterity, unimpeded by haste, Tiger Dick unbitched the best-looking of the horses, and sprung upon its back.

Now he yelled and dug his heels into the sides of the frightened animal, to goad it to its wildest speed. No need for rein had he. Away! away! out of range of the whistling bullets of his enemies! Away! away! to the friendly shelter of the rocks which bordered this open plain.

Grasping his revolver, which had but three chambers remaining loaded, he turned in his seat.

His foremost pursuer had a revolver trained upon him.

The weapon spoke.

The Tiger felt a twinge of pain in his knee. He bent the joint. No harm had been done. It was but a graze.

"Let me teach you a lesson in marksmanship. You're a muff. Mind your eye!" cried the Tiger.

And though he had no bullets to waste, his aim was instantaneous.

The pursuer's horse tossed his head at that instant—and saved his rider's life! But the animal came down with a crash, and the man shot far over its head.

"One!" yelled the Tiger. "Ha! ha!"

And in mocking triumph he waved his revolver, clasped in his manacled hands, above his head.

On! on! once more, the huntsmen wild with excitement, the quarry cool and calculating.

The iron nerves of the Tiger had been trained at the gaming-table. Whether he played a winning or a losing game, nothing perturbed him. Now, with his life in the balance, he was the same cool Tiger Dick.

He had an inferior horse, but used him "for all he was worth." Fate had "stocked" the cards against him; but he did not "whine."

As his enemies once more gained upon him, he muttered:

"You want another lesson, my fine fellow? Well, here goes! *Exit number two!*"

Again his revolver spoke—and made a horse riderless!

But his foes were plucky.

"Stick to him, gents! He's got but one shot more! I speak for that!" cried the foremost.

And an answering yell showed that the ardor of the rest was not dampened by the misfortune of their comrades.

Again and again the sharp reports of their revolvers broke on the air.

Tiger Dick's horse winces and utters a shrill cry of pain and terror.

Suddenly the Tiger's left arm loses all sense of feeling and sags a dead weight on his right wrist, to which it is handcuffed.

The Tiger smiles like some beautiful devil yielding to his fate, yet unconquered in spirit.

On! on! amid whistling bullets, any one of which may bridge the Dark River in a breath!

On! on! when each mad leap may be the last, and the dying steed, sinking beneath his master, may yield him up to a death of ignominy!

On! on! until the bold rider seems to have won the Fates, and snatched from their willing hands the talisman of a charmed life!

Crimson foam flies from his horse's lips. The eyes of the poor brute are bloodshot and protruding. He is in the last stages of exhaustion.

But now the chase is nearly done. It has traversed the mountain glen and come to where the ground is again broken and rocky. Here yawn abysmal chasms; yonder loom giant cliffs hundreds of feet in height.

Tiger Dick hears the clatter of iron-bound hoofs in hot pursuit.

Crack!

The horse utters a piercing cry.

"Hurrah!" yells a voice.

The horse shivers—stumbles.

"Down with him! There he goes! Hurrah! Hurrah!"

The horse recovers and staggers on.

A yell of rage from the pursuers.

"Give him another! He's almost done!"

"Curse the horse! Plug the man!"

"Crack! Crack! Crack!"

A useless waste of powder and ball, so far as the horse is concerned. His hour has come.

One mighty bound—his last. With a gurgling, gushing, hissing sound, a torrent of bright pink blood streams from his mouth and nostrils. One last, almost human cry, drowned in a second flood of the red tide of life, and he sinks to the ground.

Agile as a mountain-goat, Tiger Dick leaps off at the last moment, alighting firmly on his feet.

Yell on yell goes up from the triumphant pursuers.

The Tiger wheels round.

The foremost rider is close upon him.

"Surrender!"

"IN THE NEXT WORLD!"

And the Tiger, undaunted still, fires his last shot.

In the very clutch of death the pursuer tries to speed a return bullet. But his stiffening fingers, no longer obedient to his will, disconcert his aim. The ball flies wild. The rider topples headlong to the ground, at Tiger Dick's very feet.

"And another soul made happy!" comes in icy tones of mockery from the lips of the man who never knew remorse.

Wild swell the enraged yells of his enemies at the fall of their champion. On they come, like a band of furies.

He hurls his now useless weapon toward them in disdain.

"Ha! ha! ha!" rings out his mocking laugh, as he springs away among the rocks. "Now follow who can!"

And he disappears from view.

But the canyon catches up the challenge; and every crag becomes vocal with fiendish mockery.

"Ha! ha! ha! Now follow who can!—Ha! ha! ha! Follow who can!—Ha! ha! Who can!—Ha! ha! Who can!—Ha!—can!—Ha!—can!—Ha!—can!"

Vainly his enemies scramble among the rocks, running hither and thither, hunting in every nook and cranny, determined not to give up the pursuit. Empty their threats—futile their imprecations—impotent their rage!

The Tiger has eluded them all!

Alone in the mountain solitude, faint with the loss of blood and exhausted by his Titan

struggles, hampered by a pair of wrought-iron handcuffs which might be bent but not easily broken by any force at his command, Tiger Dick sat on a boulder and contemplated his fate.

He could not seek his fellow-men and appeal to them to strike off this badge of crime. Where men were, there the gallows awaited him!

But was not starvation his only alternative? How could he get food thus crippled?

Meanwhile, what was the extent of his hurt? A flesh-wound or a broken arm?

He felt the sodden condition of his garments. Might he not bleed to death? At worst, that were preferable to the lingering tortures of starvation or the ignominy of the gallows.

He raised a fragment of rock and placed it between his wrists, with difficulty retaining it there. The pain in his helpless left arm wrung beads of icy sweat from his brow.

His white teeth, now clinched hard, showed beneath his black mustache, as his lips were drawn away in a grimace which marked the mighty battle between unspeakable agony and iron resolve.

With infinite pains he dropped his burdened wrists, so as to bring the manacle between the rock he held and the jagged edge of a boulder. The rock rolled off on his left forearm.

Even his stout heart could not suppress a gasping moan; and the man who had unflinchingly faced death a score of times yielded to a throes of anguish and sunk to the ground in a swoon.

Long he lay like one dead. When he awoke he could scarcely get upon his feet for very weakness. His left shoulder was terribly swelled, and the least motion made him giddy with pain.

He looked at his manacled wrists. They were lacerated, and the wounds stopped by coagulated blood. Not an impression had been made on his iron bonds.

He began to be tortured by thirst, the dread enemy which first assails a wounded man. Where could he find the blessed boon of a draught of cold water? This was now his one aim.

He staggered forward over the broken ground, never heeding whither his feet tended, looking only for signs of water—a thread of the crystal fluid trickling from some crevice in the rocks; a few drops collected in some hollow; a piece of damp clay that he might lick—anything!—anything!—only water!

So fell the night, yet he wandered on until a false step in the gloom threw him from his unsteady footing, and he fell exhausted, almost fainting, to the ground.

Now strange visions came to his phantom-haunted brain; for the fever-tide coursed madly through his swelling veins. All about him the gloom was peopled by weird shadows, which flitted hither and thither with noiseless tread, peering at him with rayless eyes, touching him with formless fingers, trailing their intangible vestments over the dry leaves without a rustle. Now they hovered near, now drew apart, seeming to confer together, but ever directing their eyes at him.

One of the phantoms pointed to the ground with his shadowy finger, and looking there the Tiger saw a mangled body, as of a man who had fallen from a height. The gaping wounds of the ghastly corpse seemed to take voice and cry out, gaspingly:

"Murder! Murder! Murder!"

A second phantom, flitting forward like an icy wind, bent over the Tiger and lifted a veil, from out of the gloom of whose shadow a pair of eyes stared into his with the wild glare of insanity. He could see but these and clots of blood that fell like tears to the earth, which shrunk away with cries of horror, caught up by the echoes and made articulate, till all the rocks around seemed shuddering with the cry:

"Murder! Murder! Murder!"

Jim Farnsworth was there, his brave face veiled by a cloud of smoke; deputy Bragg, with his dazed bewilderment; Comanche Bob, pallid with craven fear; and those unknown horsemen whom the Tiger's bullets had toppled to the earth—all staring with accusing eyes that said:

"We are your victims!"

So went round and round the dread procession.

The morning light witnessed a man in whose soul reason had been thrust from her citadel, wandering without purpose among the rocks. The noonday sun looked down upon a chattering imbecile. The dews of evening dropped their cool libation on a still, upturned face.

Let his foes come now. A child might make the dauntless Tiger captive!

CHAPTER III.

THE QUEEN OF THE FANDANGO.

TALL, erect, ponderous, with a piercing eye, a long straight nose with flowing beard, Col. Ogleshorpe was a man who made his way through the world like a strong-limbed war-horse.

The Rev. Giles Goddard was slight in build,

smooth-shaven, and with mild blue eyes beneath an expansive, intellectual brow.

The colonel was smiling incredulously.

"It's plain that you haven't taken the measure of Freeze-out Camp yet," said he.

"To your kindness I am to owe the privilege of a preliminary survey to-night," smiled the other.

"Oh, I'll put you through!" cried the colonel. "I reckon, though, it would create a sensation in a certain New England Dorcas society, if they could see you now. However, here we are at Fandango Hall, the front door of the other place, if there's one such in the Rockies."

From the calm, starlit night and balsamic mountain air, they passed into the yellow glare, foul fumes and unhallowed babel of a mining dance-house, where their ears were assailed by the jingle of glasses and the rather dubious strains of a violin and harp, above which ever and anon rose the blare of a cornet, the whole drowned in deafening rounds of applause, cheers, yells, shrill whistles, hand-clapping and the stamping of heavy boots.

"Hallo, colonel! How goes it?" was the boisterous salute of one who smote the person addressed a resounding thwack on the shoulder. "Jest in time to see the circus. But how in thunder that leetle devil gits over the ground without shakin' her legs loose, I'll be hanged if I'll ever tell ye! But thar's plenty of time. She's good for ten minutes, yet. Step up and irrigate. An' this hyar's your friend, I reckon."

"Mr. Goddard—Judge Starkey," was Colonel Ogleshorpe's simple introduction.

"I won't give away the 'divine' just yet," he reflected, with a covert twinkle in his eye.

Judge Starkey seized the delicate hand of the minister with a gripe that had been cultivated swinging a prospecting pick.

"It does me proud, sir, to take an honest man by the hand," he said, with boisterous Western cordiality. "From the States?"

"From Massachusetts," said the Rev. Giles, rather overpowered.

"Waal, sir, went on his new friend, "I'm glad you've give us a call. We've got lots of room out hyar; and ye don't throw away yer time nor money comin' to see what we've got to show ye. I reckon, now, you'd like to bottle up some of our climate. It 'ud peddle out for a right smart figur' almost anywhar along the Atlantic coast. You hyear me? I've been thar! An' as fur whisky— But thar!—ye kin sample some right hyar, now, that'll jest bark the hide—"

"Hold on, Josh," interrupted Colonel Ogleshorpe, as his companion flushed to the roots of his hair with embarrassment. "Perhaps I ought to have said—the Reverend Giles Goddard."

"I beg you pardon, my dear sir!" said Judge Starkey, with a profound bow. "But it is so onfrequent that we see the 'cloth' out hyar—"

"No offense, sir, I assure you," stammered the divine.

"Takin' a sly peep at the elephant, I reckon?" ventured the judge, recovering his off-hand heartiness, and favoring the minister with a wink of sympathy, as he added:—"Two thousand miles from home—eh? Waal, sir, we've got him around hyar about as big an' rampageous as they make 'em, ef I do say it. Now hyar's Fawn-eyed Fan, that 'ud jest start the ha'r to sproutin' on the bald heads o' some o' Boston's veteran front-rowers. Jest step this hyar way, whar ye kin git a fair squint, an' ef you've got a cleaner leg or a lighter pair o' heels than them thar east o' the Mississipp, ye kin rake my pile, an' nary squeal!"

And shouldering his way through the crowd and making room for his friends, Judge Starkey disclosed a characteristic Western scene—a circle of rough miners, all of them with their hats on and most of them smoking, interspersed with a dozen or so of women, brave in tawdry finery and with paint on cheeks and lips.

In a clear space in the center of the room stood several inverted goblets, serving as pedestals for smaller, slender-stemmed glasses brimming with what by courtesy was called wine, in and out among which whirled a *danseuse* in giddy gyrations.

The girl, of undeniable beauty of face and figure, was dressed in the fanciful Spanish costume, with tinkling bells depending from her bracelets and from the gay lacings bound about her shapely ankles, affording a quivering silvery accompaniment to the click of castanets. As she glided through the intricacies of a dance combining the graceful attitudinizing of the Orient with the quicker steps and pirouettes of the European ballet, she swayed a filmy scarf, and ever anon letting it fall across her face so as to enhance the effect of coquettish glances from her great, liquid brown eyes, which carried the hearts of her rude admirers by storm.

"Thar, sir," announced Judge Starkey, waving his hand after the manner of a showman—"thar's Fawn-eyed Fan, the Belle o' Fandango Hall, an' the brag heifer o' this hyar camp, in her celebrated wine-glass specialty! Thar ain't many women on this hyar revolvin' footstool what's put together in jist that thar shape. We fellers o' Freeze-out backs her with our pile ag'in the known world. Do I hear any takers?"

At once catching sight of Colonel Ogleshorpe,

the danseuse favored him with a saucy nod and smile, and a luring glance from her almond-shaped eyes that caused his bronzed face to brighten with pleasure.

After a *coup* which surpassed all that had preceded it and set the spectators fairly wild with enthusiasm, to express which some tossed their hats to the ceiling while others dashed theirs to the floor, one actually stamping upon his and uttering a yell of concentrated delight, she bounded from amid the glasses, skipped up to Col. Oglethorpe, made a mock obeisance, and extended her hand with an unblushing boldness that shocked the Rev. Giles, though of course he had no reason to expect different deportment.

"Put it thar, Joe?" was her breezy salutation; and when Col. Oglethorpe complied, she shook his hand vigorously, continuing:—"Why bless yer leetle heart and soul, I'm right glad to see ye! But," with a sudden change to mock displeasure, "you don't deserve it. Where have you kept yourself this dog's-age?"

And seizing upon the colonel's long beard, she shook his head almost as spiritedly as she had shaken his hand, crying:

"Answer me, sir!—answer me!"

At this rough pleasantry the Rev. Giles winced, while the denizens proper of Freeze-out Camp roared with the boisterous guffaw of rude bordermen, and the colonel, evidently not ill-pleased, though he grimaced with pain, cried good-naturedly:

"Hold on, you little vixen! That is to say, let go! Leave some of this for the next time, I say; or not a drop of champagne do you get out of me this night."

The girl finished by slapping his cheek, and then leaped back and stood laughing to see him readjust his hat and pull himself together generally.

She was flushed and panting from her recent exercise. The glorious eyes that had given her her sobriquet did not flash nor sparkle, but seemed to burn with the internal fire of an opal. There was noticeable none of the forced gayety which was so pathetic in the jaded women who filled the room. Her mirth seemed spontaneous and as light-hearted as a child's.

With an awkward sense of unfitness, yet seeing no way out of the dilemma, Colonel Oglethorpe introduced his friend.

One swift glance read the Rev. Giles Goddard's look of pitying regret; and the merry coquette froze into the disdainful duchess, and swept him a stately courtesy. Then she thrust her hand through Judge Starkey's arm and led him away, with a pert nod of parting over her shoulder to Col. Oglethorpe.

"Where in all creation did Joe strike that Miss Nancy?" she asked her escort—"from Bosting?" with a grimace that set Josh Starkey off in a roar of laughter that shook the room.

At that very moment, in reply to Colonel Oglethorpe's rather dubious interrogatory:

"Waal, does it look anyways promising?"—the minister was saying:

"If I can be the humble means of saving only one, it is well worth the trying."

And his eyes followed wistfully the woman who had exercised her wit at his expense.

"All right, if you say so," replied the colonel, in his off-hand way; "but I reckon Mike 'll look on the whole thing as an advertisement, and the boys will take it in as a lark."

Five minutes later he was introducing his friend to Mike Dougherty—or Mottle-mugged Mike, as the boys called the pock-marked proprietor of Fandango Hall—adding that the minister had a little joint enterprise to propose.

"Very good, yer honor," was the Irishman's hearty acquiescence. "Ye'll foind that I'm the bye fur yer money, av tha-ur's anny speckilation on fut that shows the tail-end of a chance fur a stake."

When informed what the purpose was, he stared in dumb amazement—only for a moment, when his eyes began to twinkle shrewdly, as he saw that there was "something in it," and striking the bar with his fist, he cried:

"Dom me, but ye shall do ut!"

Then, spitting in the palm of his hand, he extended it to the minister to clinch the bargain, a ceremony which it is needless to say that gentleman evaded, as he hastily expressed his thanks.

A moment later he stood with his hat off, while Mottle-mugged Mike beat the bar with a short club, and shouted:

"Or-rdthur! Or-rdthur! Will yez be 'azy, ye divils, whoile the gentleman spakes wid yez!"

CHAPTER IV.

A SENSATION IN FREEZE-OUT.

AT the last moment Col. Oglethorpe plucked the Rev. Giles's sleeve and whispered a timely warning:

"It must be ladies and gentlemen, ye onderstand!"

"Ladies and gentlemen," began the minister, "I have gained the permission of your fellow-townsmen, Mr. Michael Dougherty, to hold divine services in this room to-morrow (Sunday) afternoon, at three o'clock. I hope that those

now present and others who wish to hear the Word of God will be in attendance. I thank you for your courteous attention."

Bowing, he turned and left the dance-house with Col. Oglethorpe, amid profound silence, every eye following him in amazement.

"Fandango Hall turned into a gospel-shop! Good Lord! Ha! ha! ha!"

It was the clear, bell-like voice of Fawn-eyed Fan, with a ring of mockery in it, that broke upon the impressive stillness.

But the laugh that followed her sally was not general. So startling an announcement was matter for serious investigation; and Mottle-mugged Mike was immediately surrounded by a mob of eager questioners.

"Howd off, ye divils!" he cried, as he laughingly fought them back. "Is it meself that's displayed no intherproise before this, that ye'd think the worruld would be coming to an ind whin I give the byes a little show? Och! bad scran to yez! whin did I iver spaur throuble or expinse on yan omadhans, that don't know the differ betune Fandango Hall—as hasn't a betther this soide o' Frisco, bedad!—betune Fandango Hall, as I was saying, and Billy Cabeen's dug-out, beyant?"

"But the gospel-sharp, Mike?" queried an anxious one.

"Whist, man! will yez be 'azy till the morrow? Tha-ur—divil a wurrud more will yez get out o' me!"

Nor did the curious miners receive any more satisfaction from Col. Oglethorpe when he returned to the saloon after parting with his friend; for he laughingly put them off with:

"Look hyer, boys, I'd rather talk to Fan than to the best-looking one of your crowd; so you jest dry up!"

To the queen of the dance herself he said:

"Hang it all, Fan! whar were your eyes? Didn't you drop to the 'cloth? It was the worst dead give-away I ever saw."

To which the lady replied, chucking him playfully under the chin:

"There, Joey; we won't mind about that duck, will we? Come, now—tell me whom you found to flirt with down in Canyon City—that's a good boy!"

All the following morning Fandango Hall was filled and overflowing into the street while rival establishments would have hailed the seediest bummer in the camp as a relief from the dull monotony of emptiness. Mottle-mugged Mike was smiling. He had anticipated the rush by erecting a temperance bar outside for the accommodation of those who were unable to crush their way into the already packed room.

Fawn-eyed Fan's persistent jests proved that she had not yet forgiven the look she had detected in the Rev. Giles Goddard's eyes.

"Lay in a good supply of irrigating fluid, boys," she cried. "There's going to be the longest drought that ever struck this camp. From the time the circus begins till she lets out, nary drop is to be sold across that bar. If you don't believe me, ask 'your fellow-townsmen, Mr. Michael Dougherty!'"

All laughed at this take-off on the Rev. Giles, even the bullet-headed proprietor of Fandango Hall himself, who said, good-naturedly:

"Well, that handle don't fit the likes o' this jug very well, an' it's thrue fur you, Miss Impudence."

To this day the "boys" tell of that meeting, how the hats came off "all round," when the minister, backed by some half-dozen representative men of the camp, stood on the musicians' platform; how, when he prayed, a death-like hush reigned; how, when he sung one of the old, old hymns, the strain was caught up in quavering accents by women who seemed almost afraid of their own voices joined to anything sacred; how his appeal, urged with fiery eloquence and melting pathos, made "every man Jack feel powerful streaked about the gills," while more than one of the women sobbed aloud.

As for Fawn-eyed Fan, how she got out of the room no one knew; but when the services were concluded she was not there.

After dark Col. Oglethorpe came upon her in the mountain road. Seizing him by the shoulders, she demanded, fiercely:

"Why did you bring that canting fool here? Bah! what am I talking about? Come, Joey! we'll make a night of it, just to show him that he hasn't bluffed us with his psalm-singing—eh?"

Col. Oglethorpe was completely nonplused. Here were three changes of mood in as many seconds. Who could read such a woman?

That night the queen of the fandango carried everything before her. But the old naturalness was replaced by something almost terrible. Her wit was like forked lightning; her gayety was like the rush of the storm-wind.

Describing the scene afterward, not very well pleased, to his friend, Col. Oglethorpe said:

"Doc, you shot over the mark that time, as true as you live. That sermon turned a woman that had her good points—and a good many of 'em, too!—into a reckless little devil. If she don't go down-grade, from this time on, with all brakes swinging loose, I'm no prophet! It's

a doggone shame that the thing should turn out so."

The minister made no comment.

But the time came when, goaded by thoughts which she could no longer hold at bay, Fawn-eyed Fan rushed forth into the wilderness crying:

"Oh, that I might die!—that I were dead—dead!"

Tears blinded her eyes; her heedless foot slipped as she started to cross a tree-trunk which bridged a yawning chasm; and she went whirling down! down! with a breathless rush. By instinct, not reason, her desperate clutch fastened upon some bushes which grew from the face of the cliff; and her terrible fall to mutilation and death was temporarily arrested. Sand and dirt, falling about her like rain, blinded her and filled her mouth, as she gasped for breath. With a shudder she heard detached pieces of rock strike far below in the canyon bottom.

That was it!—mutilation added to the horror of this sudden and awful fulfillment of her blasphemous wish. Was it a judgment?

A frenzy of terror took possession of her—something more than the mere dread of death.

"Oh, God! must I die?" rung out her voice in shrill accents of fear that would have caused the stoutest heart to quail. "I am not fit! Spare me—oh spare!"

Her despairing eyes were strained toward that heaven which had never before seemed so distant, which now looked down upon her wretchedness in unmoved serenity.

The deep blue dome, the white sailing clouds, the whispering pines, the birds whose joyous trill and twitter seemed to tell her that she was forgotten by nature as by nature's God—all the bright, glad world was slipping from her grasp!

She felt her hands relaxing; her brain began to whirl; she was going down! down!

"Help!—oh, God!" she gasped.

Then, at the last moment, as if in answer to her prayer, a face appeared over the cliff, clearly outlined against the sky.

A cry of horror—then a shout of encouragement.

Her reply was a shriek of hysterical laughter.

CHAPTER V.

THE DUMB BANDIT.

Now creeping at a snail's pace up some steep incline, now rumbling and roaring, with lightning speed, down some rocky declivity—here buried in the depths of a mountain gorge; there shelved on a narrow ledge half-way up the face of a bald cliff, with rocks towering to the clouds on one hand, and cleft down! down! to the very foundations of the earth on the other—the Overland coach threaded its tortuous way through the heart of the Sierras.

On the box Roaring Reddy Rolf had "a-holt o' the ribbons"—a man "as could run faster, jump further, kick higher, strike harder, yell louder, stand up under more red lightnin' whisky, drive nearer the edge of a precipice, or graze a boulder at lightning speed closer than any other galoot alive!"

Among the "pilgrims" in his "hearse" was a young girl of exquisite beauty—Nellie Farnsworth, the pride of stout Jim Farnsworth's heart, who, with a pluck which she had inherited from intrepid Jim himself, had planned and executed "a little surprise for her darling papa"—no less an undertaking than going all the way to Freeze-out Camp to meet him on his return to the Pacific Slope with his prisoner, Tiger Dick.

On the front seat sat a young man whose attentions—not too free, according to the western code of etiquette—she had received with pretty coyness. Intelligent, above the common rank of miners, yet no carpet knight, as his broad shoulders, lithe limbs and resolute mien showed, she never thought of doubting his courage, but blushed with maiden confusion, when he said:

"But remember, gentlemen, we have a lady aboard, and don't want any promiscuous shooting. So I reckon if the Dumb Bandit tackles us this trip, it's our play to put our piles at his disposal without arguing the matter, trusting to the chance of getting even with him next time."

"That's what I call hoss sense; and hoss sense beats the world," declared Roaring Reddy. "Thar ain't no foolishness about the Dumb Bandit, you bet! He means business—every time! Pardner, I'll lay my pile that they foler your lead all round the board."

"Mebbe we mought, an' then ag'in maybe we moughtn't," observed an individual whose style of dress was in keeping with his general air of braggadocio. "This hyar does the talkin'!"

And Lightning Joe slapped his revolver significantly.

"Gents!" called Roaring Reddy, in a guarded tone, "fur rocks, you're a-goin' to have a chance to show yer hands. Hyar comes the devil himself. Stand from under!"

With his last words blended the ringing command:

"Halt!"

"You bet!" responded Roaring Reddy, and as promptly reined in his plunging horses.

"Oh, Mr. Bashford!" cried Nellie Farnsworth.

"Blazes!—we're ooked!" quavered the redoubtable Lightning Joe.

"Don't be frightened. At most, only our gold-dust will suffer, I reckon," was George Bashford's assurance, as he calmly opened the coach door to look out.

"Hold on, pardner! Don't git out thar!" cried Lightning Joe, clutching at the skirts of his coat.

But there was an even more cogent argument from without—a cocked revolver thrust almost into his face and the terse interrogatory:

"Savy?"

"You bet, stranger," said Bashford, pleasantly. "I reckon this trick is yours. I hope when your turn comes you'll shut up as cheerfully as I do now."

"Bet yer life, boss, I'll dance with my boots on!" responded the outlaw, in rather ghastly reference to his probable mode of exit from the world. "Come, gents, chuck out yer weepers!"

As George complied, he saw, thrust in at the other side of the coach, another pistol, to whose "backer" Lightning Joe was capitulating with very unwarlike precipitancy.

"All right, Mr. Dumb Bandit! Don't shoot! We cave! Hyar's my pile!"

"You're purty bad skeered, stranger," said the road-agent, with a horse laugh. "What d'ye take me for? I reckon thar hain't nothin' dumb about me. Jest look at my yawp. Ya-ah! Ha! ha! ha! Pass out yer shootin'-irons, an' keep yer dust till it's called fur."

When all the occupants of the coach had complied with this demand, the assailant on one side gave place to two horsemen, who had first appeared blocking the road and fetching the coach to a halt.

Like their companions, these two wore black masks.

One was a burly ruffian, with a bull neck and coarse, bushy whiskers, and nothing in dress or manner to distinguish him from the ordinary mountain outlaw.

The other was a rather small man, though he sat proudly erect, as one born to command. His dress was Mexican, from stiff-brimmed sombrero to jingling spurs with cruel rowels. The trappings of his horse—an animal slight in build, yet evidently strong and fleet—were in keeping.

As this elegant bandit drew up beside the coach, he raised his sombrero with a small hand gauntleted in fawnskin tanned to a snowy whiteness. His head was bound about, after the Mexican fashion, with a silk handkerchief dyed in all the colors of the rainbow.

Without speaking, he bowed politely to the inmates of the coach. But in the very act he uttered a sharp, inarticulate cry, and his sombrero dropped unheeded from his hand into the dust of the road. He urged his horse to the very door of the coach, leaned forward in the saddle, and glared at Nellie Farnsworth through the eye-holes in his mask.

The cry had expressed surprise and rage. Now his breath came in rapid pants, and the hand with which he clutched the jamb of the coach door trembled perceptibly.

With a rippling murmur of dismay the girl shrunk back. Unarmed as he was, brave George Bashford sprang forward to protect her from insult with his life if need were.

But the Dumb Bandit recovered himself and withdrew to a little distance with his lieutenant, who was known among his fellows, the Free Rangers of the Sierras, as Boss Kane.

Evidently the Dumb Bandit was not dumb in reality, but chose to let no one save his trusted lieutenant hear his voice. So, when they returned to the side of the coach it was Boss Kane who addressed Nellie Farnsworth, plainly according to instructions.

"Miss, what is your name?"

"Nellie Farnsworth," replied the girl in tremulous accents, while George Bashford grew pale with indignation, yet judiciously restrained himself.

At the pronunciation of the name the Dumb Bandit uttered an involuntary sound, and his hand gripped the butt of his revolver.

"Daughter of Jim Farnsworth, the Frisco sheriff?" asked Boss Kane, pursuing his role of inquisitor.

"Yes, sir."

The Dumb Bandit dug his spurs into his horse's flanks, and for a moment the animal plunged wildly until curbed by the cruel Mexican bit. Whoever the masked outlaw might be, his hatred for Jim Farnsworth amounted almost to frenzy.

George Bashford's heart sunk as he reflected that Nellie was exposed to the fury of this ruthless robber chieftain. Now had he but his trusty revolvers back again!

"Where is your father?" continued Boss Kane.

But the brave girl replied, firmly:

"Do you think that I would betray my father to such villains as you? Look out that he does not one day inform you in person of his whereabouts. If that day should ever come you will rather seek who he is not!"

Boss Kane chuckled.

"That'll do, ma'am," he said.

Then turning to the male occupants of the coach, he pursued:

"Gents, git down out o' that!"

All complied.

Then came the laconic order:

"Shell out!"

Broad palms received the "forced loan," and then with practiced dexterity searched the victims that nothing of value might be kept back.

Meanwhile one of the outlaws' horses was brought to the side of the coach, and Boss Kane again addressed Nellie Farnsworth.

"Beg pardon, ma'am; but it's the captain's orders to take the whole of you, jist as you are. Sorry I hain't got a lady's saddle, but this hyar's the best we kin offer."

"What!" cried the girl in dismay, "do you mean that I shall accompany you?"

"Fetched it the fust clatter, ma'am!"

Here was an unheard-of proceeding. All stood aghast.

"Oh, sir!" cried the girl, addressing the Dumb Bandit, "you do not intend to abduct me?"

Mutely the robber-chieftain waved his hand, expressing impatient assent.

Without taking thought of their helpless condition, the frightened girl turned to her fellow-passengers, and cried:

"Gentlemen, I appeal to you for protection!"

"And not in vain, by Heaven!" came bold George Bashford's prompt response.

With a bound he leaped upon Boss Kane, who seemed the most formidable of the band, clutched him by his bushy whiskers, and tore him from his horse.

"Away, Reddy! Drive for your life!" he yelled, as he rolled on the ground with the outlaw whom his unexpected assault had unhorsed.

And Roaring Reddy, who had pledged his word to "pull her through, or bust," rose to his feet, whirled his whip through the air until its long lash hissed like a serpent and cracked like the report of a pistol, and added thereto a wild Comanche yell, to startle his horses into whirlwind speed.

Nothing recked he now of the revolvers of the outlaws. While life lasted he would do his best to save Jim Farnsworth's daughter.

Away swept the coach, with the rush of an avalanche.

There was a moment of surprised inactivity. Then the Dumb Bandit drew his revolver and fired.

Faithful Roaring Reddy threw up his hands and tumbled headlong from his coach.

Now a full realization of the awful situation burst upon the spectators.

In the mountain road where one false step would sweep all to destruction, four terrified horses, with no hand to check or guide, were running away! What power could save the devoted girl?

Feeling the very breath of the death-angel on her cheek, yet preferring the fate upon which she was rushing to that from which she was snatched, Nellie Farnsworth closed her eyes and prayerfully awaited the final crash.

Followed by half his men, the Dumb Bandit dashed in pursuit.

The superior fleetness of the saddle-horses enabled it soon to overtake the runaways; but the road was now too narrow to admit of its passing the coach, and its rider had to be content with galloping helplessly in the rear. On one side was the precipice, on the other an abrupt escarpment of rock, while the booted coach hid the crouching girl and the terrified horses that were bearing her to destruction.

On the wings of the wind they were approaching a sharp angle in the road which could not be passed at this lightning speed. Coach, horses and all would be whirled over the cliff, to fall down! down! hundreds of feet to the rock-strewn cannon bottom!

The Dumb Bandit could neither leap the coach, nor pass round it, to get at the heads of the flying leaders and check their mad career. In this dilemma—the desperate choice between certain death and a possible salvation, which at best would require almost a miracle—he took a terrible risk.

They had reached a point where the mountain side to the left sloped downward at an angle of perhaps forty-five degrees for some little distance before reaching the verge of sheer descent. The slope was studded with boulders, and bristled with pines that grew in crevices in the rock. Here a turn in the road to the right brought the leaders into view between the coach and the wall of rock into which the road had been notched.

It was his only chance. The Dumb Bandit raised his pistol, and fired.

The off leader came down in a heap, shot through the head. With a bound the wheeler cleared the body of his fallen comrade, but was brought to his knees by the entangling harness. Falling upon the tongue of the coach, he pressed its point to the ground, where it struck a slight rocky projection.

The fore wheels rose in the air, doubling the coach in that terrible collapse to which a four-wheeled vehicle is exposed by the dropping of the tongue; and the "whole outfit" (to borrow

a westernism) rolled over and over down the steep descent, dragging the struggling horses after it.

With an involuntary cry and a shudder of horror, the Dumb Bandit drew rein and watched the fell result of his shot.

Even the hardened ruffians who followed his evil fortunes could not repress ejaculations of dismay.

One piercing human scream had come from the coach. Then there was only the ring of timbers and the cries of the terrified horses.

CHAPTER VI.

A PASSIONATE HEART.

On the utmost pinnacle of a mountain peak stands a female figure, like a statue of the fabled Minerva springing from the apex of some towering dome.

Her flowing, coal-black hair, her flashing black eyes, her broad, white forehead, her firm lips and resolute chin, her proud bearing of conscious strength—all go to give her the commanding presence of the warlike goddess; yet she is dressed in unpretending home-spun—a horrid disguise, which still fails to mask the matchless physique and the all-sovereign spirit.

The woman stands gazing with eagle glance toward the east, where all the heavens are ablaze with splendor, and the horizon is fairly tremulous with the dazzling glory of the day-god just about to spring into view.

It comes!—a streaming flood of light, like a flight of golden arrows, striking the figure of the woman and haloing it, while all the mountain lies yet in shadow. Clearly outlined against the sky, she catches an almost superhuman beauty, until the beholder might think her indeed a goddess, receiving the first greeting of the morning.

But the look of inspiration dies out of her face; the proud head droops; tears quench the fire of the dark eyes; the firm lips quiver and fall apart; and from the heart of the woman, plaintive with pathos unspeakable, springs the cry:

"Under the broad canopy of heaven I love no living thing! In all the glad earth no living thing loves me!"

Sobs choke her utterance. She covers her face with her hands.

But a low, whimpering sound called her from her sorrow. She turned to a dog that had sat patiently at her side.

The animal—a huge mastiff—moved uneasily, beat his tail on the ground, and barked up at his mistress's face.

The woman dropped upon her knees beside her brute friend, and flung her arms about his neck, crying:

"Yes! yes! I was unjust to you. You are true. Your love is genuine and disinterested."

The dog licked the woman's tear-wet face, almost as a human comforter might have kissed her hot eyelids.

But the desolate creature rose again to her feet, gazing up into the sky, and crying with something of petulant protest:

"But I want human sympathy—human love! Why is it granted to other women, and denied to me? I am a woman—I am a woman!" went out the cry of her heart. "Why is my lot cast among demons in the shape of men—human wolves! Great God, what have I done?"

And she stretched forth her hands in her wild invocation, as if addressing immediately the invisible power.

The heavens returned no answer. Her passionate appeal fell back cold upon her heart.

"But no!" she cried, with a sudden clinching of the hands, setting of the teeth, and blazing of the eyes, "the soft dalliance of love is not for such as I. My strength was given me for sterner work. I do not start and fly shrieking from the viper that coils in my path. I set my heel upon its head, and crush it! That is typical of my mission. I need no tenderness—no fostering care. I was born for *vengeance*! Love would soften the fibers of my hate; and my heart would fail me, when I saw my enemy writhing in the throes of death."

"Father! father! I do not forget your wrongs! I abjure all womanly weakness! I will chill my heart to the hardness of tempered steel! I will live but to execute the mission of vengeance you left me! What business have I with softness—with relenting? My path of life is marked out for me. My father calls me from his ignominious grave. Well, I will walk in the line of my destiny—and woe to them that taught me my lesson in mercilessness! Beautiful sunshine, I leave you forever! Darkness, receive me—I leap into your embrace!"

With a laugh which was a hideous mockery of joyousness, she sprung across the line of demarcation between the sunlight and shadow, and descended the precipitous slope, leaping from crag to crag with light, agile bounds, until she was entirely immersed in the shadow, and the sun-capped mountain peak glowed far above her, like some beacon-light on which she had turned her back.

In her abstraction she had not heeded the dog that accompanied her, darting untiringly hither and thither, with that ever-varying interest peculiar to canine intelligence. But now, at

some distance from the path she heard his voice raised in a long-drawn, dismal bay.

Putting a whistle to her lips, the woman blew a shrill call.

The dog came bounding toward her; circled round and round with short, sharp barks; then, coursed away again, looking back to see if his mistress followed.

Her curiosity aroused, the woman left the path at the point where the dog had disappeared, and soon came upon him, squatted on his haunches, with his muzzle raised toward the sky, and giving vent to those melancholy howls with which dogs are popularly supposed to presage, as well as announce the presence of death among the human species.

Before the animal lay the figure of a man stretched motionless, perhaps lifeless, on the ground.

With a sharp cry the woman forced her way through the bushes, and knelt beside the inanimate figure. Panting and quivering in every nerve, she raised the man's head in her arms, pillowing it on her heaving bosom, and gazing wildly into his pale face.

With a rippling murmur of despair, she laid her insensate burden down again. Wringing her hands, she gazed about helplessly, piteously, as if to conjure succoring spirits from the air, the trees, the rocks.

The dog gazed at his distraught mistress, whined with almost a human sob, barked short, sharp barks of distress and fear; then made the little glade resound with his dismal death-bay.

The woman shivered with superstitious dread, gazing at the animal as if she believed it possessed of some spirit of evil.

Once more she bent over the prostrate man, thrust her hand into his breast, placed her cheek to his bloodless lips, pressed her ear close over his heart, listening eagerly, waiting with bated breath.

A sob shook her frame as it might that of one of the weakest of her sisters. She lifted her head and gazed with all her soul in her eyes at the man who knew nothing of the deep emotions of which he was the occasion. Then she dropped her face on his cold, unresponsive one, and wept as if the very fountains of her heart were broken up.

The dog whined piteously; then thrust his cold muzzle against the woman's cheek.

She did not heed the touch, nor did she now shiver when his dreary howl broke once more on the air.

So fate brings together the strange woman with a desolate heart and a legacy of hate, and this man whose wondrous physical beauty hides a soul stained with crimes unnumbered.

CHAPTER VII.

THE BEGINNING OF A HEART TRAGEDY.

The woman lays her face to the man's and weeps, and, lifting his manacled hands, kisses them and waters them with tears of pity.

"But why do I waste precious time?" she cries, suddenly. "He must have care. He will die!—oh, he will die!"

With the mad purpose of bearing it to a place of safety, this half-frantic creature gathers the limp body in her arms, and actually struggles to her feet.

She is unusually strong for a woman, and now excitement nerves her to supernatural exertion.

Stumbling and staggering beneath her heavy burden, she traverses the rugged mountain path. Great beads of sweat start on her forehead; her teeth are set; her breath comes in short, quick pants.

She knows that she cannot long hold out; but she struggles on with fierce, defiant determination, until she sinks at last exhausted to the ground.

Then her despair finds vent in a cry which blends the petulance of a child with the rage of a baffled animal.

"He will die! He will die! Oh, God! what can I do?" she wails, in anguish.

And, seated helplessly beside the unconscious man, she wrings her hands and gazes at him through her fast-falling tears.

The dog whimpers piteously.

She looks at him, and a sudden purpose comes to her.

"Watch him, Wolf!—watch him!" she cries, springing up. "Oh, good dog! good dog! on your life do not let harm come to him!"

The dog crouches beside the inanimate form, puts his head between his paws, and looks up into his mistress's face, as if to assure her of his vigilance.

And the poor, excited creature is so affected that she drops on her knees and covers the head of the dog with kisses, crying:

"Oh, guard him well, and I will love you forever!"

Then she bends over the still, white face of the man, brushes the sodden hair from his forehead, and kisses the icy brow, whispering:

"Wait! wait! I shall not desert you. I will be back in a breath. Oh, God! oh, God! spare him!—spare him to me, who have so little!"

Then she is gone, flying like some wild creature down the mountain side.

Silence falls for a space; then from far down the mountain comes the clear ring of iron-

bound hoofs, falling in such rapid succession that the horse must be going with the fleetness of the wind down a way where death lies on every hand. Fainter and fainter grows the sound, as it recedes in the distance; and at last all is still again.

No longer affrighted, the twittering birds resume their glad greeting to the new day.

It-ti-click!—it-ti-click!—it-ti-click!

It is the clang of iron hoofs urged at a mad gallop up the rocky way.

The mastiff springs to its feet with short, sharp barks of joyful recognition, yet stands faithfully at its post.

The riders are at hand, the woman in advance, her face white, her lips quivering, her eyes burning with intense questioning, a terrible dread. She reins her reeking foam-flecked horse on his haunches and flings herself from the saddle, leaving the panting animal unheeded to sneeze with his head to the ground and champ his lathery bit, while she bends over the Tiger.

He has not changed.

With a mighty effort she stifles the hysterical cry that rises in her throat, fights down the impulse to cast herself upon the inert body, cover its still face with despairing kisses and assail its deaf ears with a mad flood of endearing epithets; and, schooling her face to impassivity, turns to the man whom she has fetched back with her.

He is burly and bushy-whiskered. His face is strange to us. It is Boss Kane without his mask.

He has followed the woman with a look of curious suspense since when she summoned him to that hot ride, deigning no explanation. Now, as he sees her bend over the unconscious man, a purple flush appears on his deeply-bronzed countenance, and his brows bend in a scowl of jealous hatred, so black, so malignant that the face, not over-prepossessing at best, is transfigured into something scarcely human.

That look bodes no good to Tiger Dick!

"The blanket—quickly! And cut saplings to make a litter," says the woman, in a tone of command, too much engrossed in her own emotions to notice any signs of mental disturbance in the bandit lieutenant.

He complies without a word, and in a few minutes Tiger Dick is on his way down the mountain in an easy, swaying stretcher, supported by the horses led one before the other.

The goal is a rude cabin, cleverly hid from prying eyes by an overhanging cliff and a dense clump of evergreens. The approach to it is up a narrow, tortuous ravine, whose flinty bottom, worn smooth by the action of water, is evidently the bed of a rushing mountain torrent when it rains.

Here the sufferer is laid on a rude, yet comfortable bunk-bed, and his rescuer turned to her assistant with the impatience of consuming anxiety.

"Go! go and bring Monsieur Carrival here without delay."

"Here!" repeated Boss Kane. "Would you betray?"

"Here!" reaffirmed the woman. "What is the secret compared with his life? Must we let him die for lack of skilled attendance?"

"But I can set an arm—"

"No! no! I'll have no bungling in this case. Go at once. I leave you to your own device for securing the surgeon. What is to be done with him afterward will be matter for future consideration. But lose no time now. Raid the camp, if our object cannot be accomplished otherwise!"

"Hadn't I better knock them bracelets off before I go?" asked the road-agent, with just a shade of doggedness in his manner.

"Stay for nothing!" cried the woman, pushing him toward the door. "Go! go!"

When she was alone she cast herself on her knees at the bedside, gazing with tremulous solicitude into the white, immobile face, and with tigerish rage at the cruel hand-cuffs.

Then, he lies so still that a great despair sweeps over her, and, lifting her clasped hands and tear-streaming eyes to heaven, she cries again, as out in the mountain:

"Spare him to me, oh God!"

A low whimper and the touch of a cold muzzle announced the sympathy of her dumb friend, and she flung her arms about the neck of this only living creature to whom she could whisper the tremulous hopes and fears that shook her breast. This from the woman who had shut all the tender humanities out of her heart, and steeled it to only ruthless revenge!

And out in the mountain, with that black scowl of devilish truculence on his face, Boss Kane was goading his horse with merciless spur, looking straight before him with eyes that saw nothing save a picture of blood conjured by his murderous imagination.

"So-o!" he muttered, grinding his words between his iron teeth—a rival! I am chucked aside with a wave of the hand, and my lily-fingered gentleman steps in and commands them—and her! He does—does he?—he does, does he?" he repeated, with a smile that drew his lips back from his teeth and imparted to his face a look of eager ferocity more fiendish, if possible, than his frown.

And drawing a huge bowie-knife from his belt, he ran his gloating eye up and down its polished blade with a blood-curdling, barking laugh that suggested not mirth, but murder.

Unwarned of this gathering cloud that loomed black and blood-lined in the sky of her happiness, the woman kept sleepless vigil beside the man she loved.

There is an ancient superstition that whoever saves the life of another will live to suffer through that person the greatest calamity of his life. Was it to be so with this passionate, yearning nature?

Hours passed. Then came the sounds of some one approaching. The woman sprang to her feet. Was it her friends, or his foes?

CHAPTER VIII.

DILAPIDATED DAN.

STRONG and active as was George Bashford, his growing muscles were no match for the time-toughened sinews of his burly antagonist; and after a brief, fierce struggle, Boss Kane rose to his feet and shook himself like some huge animal, leaving his plucky though vanquished assailant unconscious on the ground.

But George had attained his object in giving Nellie Farnsworth the one slim chance for escape. No fault of his devotion the shot that toppled Roaring Reddy from his seat, nor the more fatal one that hurled the coach and its precious burden over the cliff.

Presently a shrill whistle cut the air.

The road-agents who had been left to guard the late occupants of the coach took an unceremonious leave and galloped to rejoin their leader.

Hey presto! the return of lightning Joe's wonted assurance!

"Gents," he said, oracularly, addressing the disconsolate little group left standing in the road—two "greenies" and an "old sojer" who had done battle under the banner of King Alcohol until he was a total wreck—let this hyar be a lesson to ye. Thar's nothin' like being judg-matical in dealin' with these hyar road-agents. When the enemy's too many fur ye, cave! That thar rule 'ud 'a' saved this hyar gent a cracked knowledge-box an' yon galoot a hole through his carcase. Ye hyear me?"

Leaving the greenies to drink in open-mouthed Lightning Joe's wisdom, the old sojer, who had "been thar before," applied his flask to George Bashford's lips, observing sagely:

"That thar's purty fa'r fur talk; but w'isky's w'isky the world over; an' w'en a man's stomach's warm (hic!) he's solid!"

The event seemed to prove the soundness of the old fellow's theory; for George soon began to gather his scattered wits. His legs were shaky and his head heavy and throbbing with pain; but self was forgotten at the thought of Nellie Farnsworth's awful peril.

Lightning Joe overflowed with talk, but George soon discovered that he knew really nothing of the fate of the coach; the greenies were "scar't to death;" the old bummer—But George disdained a second glance in his direction.

Leaving them to care for Roaring Reddy, who lay dimly conscious of life with a bullet through one lung, he rushed along the mountain road until stopped by unmistakable signs of a tragedy. A moment later he had clambered down the declivity, peered over the verge of sheer descent, and made a discovery so shocking that he shrank back close to the rock, lest his trembling hands should relax their hold and he be precipitated into the abyss.

Sick with an awful horror, his brain reeling with a great despair, he was hastening back on his way to the canyon bottom, when he was stopped by the old sojer.

That well-corned individual was striving to maintain a stable equilibrium, the while remonstrating with himself in a tone of gentle encouragement.

"Stiddy thar, Dan! (hic!) Brace up, my boy—brace up! Ye kin do it, ef ye try. Sol—thar, now!—Stiddy! (hic!) stiddy, ye rickety ole cuss!"

And with a violent wrench he fetched himself up somewhat in the position of a soldier on dress parade, the effect slightly marred, it must be confessed, by the fact that the last effort had jerked his ragged cap over his left eye.

"Hold on, cunnel!" he cried, as George passed him. "I'm the individual (hic!) w'at ye're a-lookin' fur. 'Cause w'y? W'y becuz—"

"I have no use for you!" interrupted George, impatiently, passing on.

"Ex-coose me, cunnel!" urged the old bummer, carrying his hand to his cap in a military salute, and falling into step—a very wabbling step, to be sure—in George's rear, as if he had given his consent that he should accompany him. "Not sayin' as how you ain't a (hic!) mighty good man; but a good man alluz wants a good backer. The w'ich Dilapidated Dan—ef he does say it himself, as shouldn't oughter—is the boss bower w'at ye kin tie to; an' ef ye ties to 'm (hic!) ye freezes to 'im, sartain!"

"Will you oblige me by going to the devil?" cried George over his shoulder, as he strode on, irritated at having the sad thoughts of his hapless love intruded upon by this maundering old reprobate.

"Wouldn't I 'a' took the fust trick fur ye, ef I'd told ye as how the coach had gone over the cliff?" urged the old soldier of Bacchus, appealingly, still keeping pace with George's rapid stride. "Crack! bang! shoots the Dumb Bandit; kerslop comes the off (hic!) leader; an' the hull outfit doubles up like a two-foot rule, an' takes the grand bounce!"

"You knew this, and did not tell me!" cried George, with a frown of impatience.

"Boss," said the bummer, in deep humility, "you sees in the undersigned (hic!) a victim of of adverse sarcumstances, the foot-ball of a vindictive fate! Born in obscurity, cradled in poverty, reared in iniquity, w'at wonder ef my tender youth (hic!) was adorned chiefly with the left-handed virtues? Stern man frowned upon my honorable scars an' battle-worn uniform; and"—capping the climax of his woes with a maudlin blubber—"lovely woman withheld her smiles from the wanquished veteran (hic!) in the battle of life!"

"But all this is no answer to my question,"— impatiently.

"Ex-coose me, cunnel! Ef I had told ye as how the coach had gone over the cliff, ye might have hurt my feelin's by doubtin' my (hic!) weracity!"

And Dan assumed the mien of a gentleman of fallen fortunes ill-used by a cruel world.

With only a frown of vexation George kept on; but as rapidly as he walked, his self-constituted rear-guard held the pace with soldier-like precision. How he did it, when at every step down that rugged way he seemed on the point of plunging headlong to the right or to the left, was one of the mysteries of that special providence with which Bacchus seems to shield his devotees.

After a long and laborious *detour* they came upon the shattered coach and mangled horses. With a cry of horror George saw that the horses had fallen upon the coach, which was fairly splintered to kindling-wood.

"My God! what a spectacle!" he cried. "Bear a hand here!" in a voice of thunder. Then in a murmur of heart-broken sorrow: "Oh, God! my darling!—my poor darling!"

Like Titans—for Dilapidated Dan seconded his efforts with an earnestness scarcely less than his own and an energy of which his rickety frame gave no promise—they dragged the crushed bodies of the horses off the wreck.

Then, shrinking as if each bloody sliver had pierced his own flesh, George began tenderly to remove the debris of shattered wood and torn leather, looking with fearful eyes for a shred of her dress, a ribbon, or it might be a poor bruised little hand—all gone its loveliness, its warmth, its life!

So until the whole of the coach had actually been pulled away and looked under.

Then George stood up, gazing about in bewilderment, and suddenly cried:

"Why, she is not here at all!"

"No, boss, I didn't look to find the young lady hyar," observed Dilapidated Dan, betraying no surprise.

"What!" cried George, staring at him.

"I knowed (hic!) she wa'n't in the coach."

"Knew that she was not in the coach?"

"Sartain—bein's as how I seen the Dumb (hic!) Bandit pull 'er out of it."

"You saw—the Dumb—"

George could get no further.

"Clapped 'er (hic!) on a hoss, an' cut stick with 'er."

"And I was not told of this!"

"Lightnin' Joe's a white-livered cuss anyway; and I reckon (hic!) the tenderfeet was too keered out to see anything but blood, 'n shootin'-irons, 'n sich," calmly suggested the veteran votary of of Bacchus.

"But you saw it—you knew that she was not here at all!"

"Yes, boss,"—with a meek shake of the head.

"And you let me come on this fool's errand; you actually helped me here, as if you believed—"

George choked, white with fury.

"Ex-coose me, cunnel!" pleaded the bummer.

"Put yerself in my place. Try to enter into the feelin's (hic!) of a man w'at's a victim of adverse sarcumstances, the foot-ball of a vindictive fate. Ole Dilapidated Dan may be a hard pill on the outside; but his *weracity* (hic!) is whar he lives!"

And striking a stage attitude, he proceeded to quote:

"Say I am ugly; say I am sad!

Say that health and wealth have missed me!

Say I am growin' old; but add—"

Like the illustrious (hic!) Father of his Country, "I cannot, cannot—"

But here George's fury at this seeming mockery of his despair burst all bounds; and he sprung upon poor Dan as if about to tear his ramshackle old body to pieces, clutching his throat as in a vise.

CHAPTER IX. IN DEADLY PERIL.

"You besotted imbecile!"

Instantly the wretched old bummer became as limp as a rag; so that, as he sunk to the

ground in a heap, his assailant nearly fell over him.

This utter helplessness recalled George to his senses; and thrusting the old wreck from him with an ejaculation of disgust, he strode away.

Dilapidated Dan pulled himself together; tried his joints successively, as if to assure himself that they were all in working order; then sat down on a boulder, and drawing a flat black bottle from his pocket, regarded it thoughtfully a moment, and then addressed it to this effect:

"My own an' only friend—thou comforter of my solitude, thou (hic!) solace of my misfortunes, ye see w'at's the fruits o' weracity! Ef yer guardian an' protector would slide through this hyar mundane sphere on the greased (hic!) plank o' mendacity, he would shake them adverse sarcumstances an' that vindictive fate w'at pursues him with the scourge o' the Nemesis."

"But, no! Let the world judge the boss by his trappin's (hic!), the sword by its scabbard, the man by his out'ard seemin'!—let the world do that thar, an' be darned! Thar's somethin' hyar (hic!)—striking his breast. "Dilapidated Dan has *weracity*, w'en he can't flip a stiver nor git a toothful o' the consoler on tic! Stern man may frown upon his honorable scars an' battle-worn uniform"—and beginning to blubber—"lovely woman withheld her smiles from the wanquished (hic!) veteran in the battle of life; but—"

"Ex-coose me, cunnel! Oh!—ah!—um!"

And Dilapidated Dan was kissing the bottle, all his woes merged in the tender caress.

"All (hic!)—all save only thee," he murmured, "is wanity an' vexation o' sperrit!"

Meanwhile, seeking to save time by going up the canyon, instead of retracing his steps, George lost himself in the mountain, and it was only after an endless night of torturing suspense that he, on the following morning, detected Dilapidated Dan trying to hide among the rocks.

"You again?" he cried, angrily.

"Ex-coose me, cunnel!" apologized the old bummer, coming from his place of concealment and saluting *a la militaire*.

"Have you been dogging my footsteps ever since yesterday?"

"To tell ye the truth, that's about the size of it," admitted the culprit, shaking his head as if in despair at his offense.

"And why, pray?"

"(Hic!) Firstly, bein's as I reckoned you'd git lost, an' latterly, as how I seen that ye was clean gone, an' thought maybe the sarvices of a guide w'at knowed every foot of the ground fur a hundred mile around hyar wouldn't be so bad," suggested the modest Daniel.

"Then you know the way to Freeze-out Camp?"

Dilapidated Dan smiled confidently.

"Boss," he said, "I reckon me an' the ole black bottle hasn't (hic!) cruised around these hyar diggin's fur ten year up to last fall fur nothin'."

"And, knowing my anxiety to reach help at the earliest moment possible, you have let me lose a day and night wandering among these accursed rocks, when a word from you would have set me right!"

"Ex-coose me, cunnel! (hic!)" was the old bummer's plea, "if I have been timid about wenturin' to expose my weracity to impeachment. The victim (hic!)—"

But here a piercing scream echoed and re-echoed among the crags.

"Good God!" cried George, completely unnerved. "What was that? Did you hear it?"

"Yes, an' seen it, too, cunnel," replied Dilapidated Dan, unmoved.

"Saw it? What?"

"A gal jist tumbled (hic!) over the cliff, yonder."

And, as if it were an everyday occurrence, the old bummer coolly noded in the direction toward which Bashford's back was turned.

"A woman?—fallen over the cliff?" cried the latter, in horror. "Man! man! are you human, and betray such indifference to the death of a fellow-creature? Are you fool or devil?"

Meekly, deprecatingly, without a shadow of resentment, Dilapidated Dan replied:

"Ex-coose me, cunnel! Ef in self-windication I made bold to tell ye as how she was a goner (hic!) w'en I fust clapped my peepers on her, so's thar wasn't no manner o' use o' my frettin' my gizzard an' caterwaulin' woman-fashion, invidious calumny has sot down on my (hic!) weracity so airy an' so often that—"

But George had not staid to listen.

To bound away—to discover the woman in her awful peril—to stifle the cry of horror in a ringing shout of encouragement—to run rapidly across the trunk which spanned the chasm—to throw himself over the precipice, slipping, sliding, clutching this root and that jagged point of rock, hanging his life upon a single false slip, a single treacherous twig—these were the acts of reckless heroism of a man who forgot self at the call for succor from another.

The girl gazed up at her rescuer and panted a sort of gurgling, hysterical laugh, while bits of

moss and broken twigs, which came away in his grasp, fell upon her upturned face.

When he had made his way as near as possible to her, his toes rested in a crevice just above her hands. Taking a firm gripe with his left hand on a loop-shaped root on a line with his breast, he stooped until he could reach below his feet and grasp her slender wrist with his strong right hand.

At that she uttered a half-delirious cry of relief, her long-taxed strength gave out, and she swooned, her body swinging free over five hundred feet of tangible air, sustained only by a man's gripe on her wrist!

Then George made a terrible discovery. Weakened by loss of blood, fasting and the stress of the past twenty-four hours, he could not draw her up, nor gain an erect position.

But how long could he hang thus over the abyss? A few minutes at most!

Already he felt the increasing strain on his muscles—the glow of heat, soon to be followed by an intolerable pain; then the numbness and the fatal weakness; the slow but sure relaxation and the fall! Already he was weighing a terrible question in his mind. On the one hand this beautiful stranger pleaded with his manhood not to let go his hold while life lasted. A little while ago there would have been no doubt as to his response. But now the woman he loved was calling to him to live and rescue her. Why offer his life a useless sacrifice to this woman whose doom he could not stay?

But he resolved, at any rate, to cling to her until he actually felt his left hand slipping.

At this juncture something struck his unconscious burden and rebounded to the opposite side of the canyon. A glance discovered Dilapidated Dan with a lariat. George had not before thought of the old toper in the light of a possible assistant.

"Boss," he cried, with his wonted imperturbability, "ye'll find ole Dilapidated Dan a pard as ye kin tie to *every time*!—an' w'en ye ties to 'im (hic!) ye freezes to 'im!"

A second cast of the lasso failed as had the first; but at the third trial, by a skillful jerk, something like the cracking of a whip, he caused the noose to bound upward, as it gained the point directly beneath the girl's feet, and encircle her body just below the hips.

"Bravo!" cried George.

But the cheer ended in a cry of alarm.

"Stop! Do not attempt to cross the bridge! For God's sake, man, stay where you are!"

For the reeling inebriate was actually about to walk that insecure log suspended five hundred feet in mid-air! If he lost his balance, which must be inevitable, he would instinctively cling to the lasso, and all three would go whirling down into the abyss.

With drunken obstinacy Dilapidated Dan persisted in his purpose to get on the same side of the chasm with the others, where he could help them to greater advantage.

With his legs constantly entangled and his body writhing, he gained the middle of the log, then suddenly stopped, turned half round, and gave a fearful lurch.

With a murmuring cry of horror, George averted his face, closed his eyes, and waited for that twang of the lasso which would end all!

It came—a terrible cry of agonized horror from above, a violent wrench, and the dizzy consciousness that the inebriate had lost his balance and fallen from the narrow bridge suspended over five hundred feet of empty air!

CHAPTER X.

A WOMAN'S REPENTANCE.

"DRUNKEN luck" favored Dilapidated Dan in at least two points—the hither end of his lasso was tied securely about his waist, and he fell on the side of the bridge opposite to that on which he had made his cast. But the "round turn" with which he had "snubbed up" at the end of his fall of some ten or a dozen feet nearly broke him in two!

The sudden wrench jerked the lighter body of Fawn-eyed Fan upward, with such violence and abruptness that her wrist was torn from George Bashford's grasp; and the lasso being suspended across the log near its middle, the bodies at its ends went whirling round and round each other as they swung back and forth between the walls of the canyon.

After one terrible moment in which he was too thoroughly bewildered to do more than cling breathlessly to his own precarious supports, George saw the fortunate issue of the accident, made his way as rapidly as possible up the face of the cliff, and "lay out" (in sailor phrase) on the log bridge, on his belly.

Of course, his first excited effort was to draw up both bodies at once; and equally, of course—especially in his exhausted state—he found three hundred pounds "no fool of a lift." Then, having knotted his handkerchief securely about the lasso, beneath the bridge, so that it could not run over the log when the weight at one end was removed, he untwisted the lasso, so as to separate the end by which Fawn-eyed Fan was suspended, drew her up, and gently laid her limp body in security.

Humanity next called him to the succor of

the old bumper—a far less romantic duty, you may well believe! But, though considerably shaken up, Dilapidated Dan was worth a dozen dead men yet! Indeed, as George drew him over the verge of the cliff, and with little ceremony rolled him beyond the danger of falling over again, he proved that he was not so far gone but that he could find breath to gasp:

"*Ec-coose me, cunnell! (hic!)*"

Then, while George went to the more congenial task of resuscitating the beautiful stranger whom he had rescued from a frightful death, the old bumper pulled himself together, got in a sitting posture, and began to take an inventory of stock. He found that himself and his rags were all there, except his ancient military cap, which, however, might be recovered at the bottom of the canyon.

But when fumbling among his rags, his hand found and drew forth the old black bottle, such a smile of affectionate greeting as beamed on his flabby old phiz, while he breathed into its sweet throat:

"Wirtue is its own reward! *Ec-coose—(hic!) Ah! Um!*"

His felicity was undimmed by a single flaw.

Having secured his lasso and coiled it about his waist, he turned to where George bent over the yet unconscious girl, bearing in his hand the sovereign elixir of all fleshly ills—the old black bottle!

"*Ec-coose me, cun—*"

But here for the first time he got a fair view of Fawn-eyed Fan's face, with a most unlooked-for and startling result. His jaw dropped; his maudlin smile was replaced by a look of terror the most abject; and from his lips came a hoarse cry that caused George to look round. With his staring eyes fixed on the white, immobile face of the *danseuse* and his hands extended as if repelling some dread specter, the old bumper was backing away, stumbling over the broken, rocky surface of the ground.

"Good Heavens! what is the matter?" cried George.

But instead of answering—indeed, without so much as a glance at him—Dilapidated Dan turned and fled panic-stricken from the spot.

Whatever the "left-handed virtues," he deplored, George had already had sufficient taste of the old bumper's mettle to know that he was no coward to fly any ordinary danger in this headlong fashion.

"And he was looking at her. He had eyes for nothing else! By Jove! I believe he was afraid of her!"

When Fawn-eyed Fan was restored to consciousness it was found that she was too weak to stand unsupported. There was nothing for it but that George must carry her—a task to whose romance her symmetrically-rounded figure gave a counter aspect of solid reality!

George Bashford was not blind to her charms by any means, but just then his heart was so full of a certain other siren, taller, sligher, more willowy; with eyes of shy reserve, lips less full, yet quite as sweet—a chaste snow-drop, let us say, beside this full-blown rose of womanhood—that her witcheries lost somewhat of their effect.

But she! As she looked at him something stole into her heart that had never been there before. When he carried her, her arm clinging about his neck, her head resting upon that arm so that her lips nearly touched his cheek, a strange, new sense of content filled her, and she caught herself wishing that this might go on forever, and ever, and ever!

When he talked to her during the intervals while he set her down to regain his breath her manner would have puzzled her many admirers at Freeze-out Camp. The breezy, dashing assurance of the Belle of Fandango Hall was all gone. Under his glance her shell-like eyelids drooped until their long silken fringes brushed her cheeks, when a shy, fleeting color coquetted with her pallor. Her voice, too—the same whose bold, ringing music had shocked while it charmed the Rev. Giles Goddard—was now altered to cadences of coy, sweet diffidence.

The girl expressed herself as greatly puzzled as George over the strange conduct of the old bumper.

She had often heard him referred to as a butt in Freeze-out Camp, but during her month's residence there he had been away, so that she had never seen him.

The thought of that month, and of many that had preceded it, made her cheek flame scarlet and then pale again, until it rivaled the creamy whiteness of a calla lily, while her heart was pierced with a pang of remorse and despair such as she had never known before. When he took her again in his arms the tears of hopeless misery forced their way through her closed eyelids and trickled one by one down upon his shoulder.

Instead of going to Fandango Hall, she had herself carried to the cabin of a miner whose rude, yet kind-hearted wife—there were some half-dozen wives in Freeze-out Camp—made a great bustle in token of the cordiality of her reception.

When George was gone, Fawn-eyed Fan said to her hostess:

"If you will let me stay with you, Mrs. Dob-

son, until I can get work, I'll not go back to the Hall ever again."

The woman stopped abruptly and stared blankly into her face.

"Work?" she repeated—"hard work?"

"Does it seem so strange?" asked the *danseuse*, a sob in her voice and the color flaming again in her cheek.

"Do you think that a life of roses, so that one would not be likely to turn to the rougher path of honest labor?"

The bitterness, the misery in her voice brought tears into the eyes of the older woman.

"Do you mean this, Miss Fanny?" she asked.

"If you will help me. If you will let me stay with you."

"Stay with me?" repeated the woman, her generous heart swelling with a wave of strong emotion. "You can stay with me from year's end to year's end!—you ought to know that. You're welcome as flowers in May—more than ever, now!"

Then, with that mother-instinct which springs as warm, as true in the breasts of the humblest as of the most exalted of womankind, she bent over the girl and took her in her arms, saying, in a voice veined with a great tenderness, a great pity, a great joy and thankfulness:

"Your heart's in the right place, my dear. I've seen that from the first. Stick to this, with the Lord's help; and, though there'll be a good many hard places—harder than it seems to you now, maybe—you'll never regret it—never!"

But before these words were done the girl was clinging about her neck with spasmodic energy, her eyes raining tears, her body shaken by a storm of heart-broken sobs.

"Poor girl!" murmured the woman, stroking and kissing her beautiful hair—"poor girl!"

They were too deeply engrossed to notice a shadow that darkened the doorway. It was the Rev. Giles Goddard, who had overheard the whole affecting scene. He was about to make his presence known by a knock, when on second thought he turned and moved softly away.

He was unusually pale, his features were working nervously, as of one deeply moved. He passed his handkerchief across his forehead, though the day was not warm enough of itself to cause perspiration.

He was about to seek the craggy solitudes of the mountain, when signs of excitement in the camp promised a more effective diversion from the strange emotions that had begun to agitate his breast: and he turned thither.

CHAPTER XI.

"MONSEER LEE SAVONG."

GEORGE BASHFORD had gone directly to Fandango Hall, which, including under one roof and management the principal bar, gambling "lay-out," dance-house and hotel, was the social and business center of Freeze-out Camp. On one side it was flanked by the express and post-office; on the other by the shop of one of the most important men of the camp—a little Frenchman who combined the offices of assayer and surgeon.

When the "boys" stood hat in hand staring around in awe upon the little brick furnace and diminutive anvil—"that ye could put in yer weskit pocket, by thunder!"—his vials of mysterious acids, sieves, tongs, scales, bucking-board and muller, and those books which contained the lore of his wizard craft; while they waited in breathless suspense until the magician should decide whether the specimens they brought him were the harbingers of fortune or but worthless rock; when their hopes went down with that spreading of the fingers, shrugging of the shoulders, arching of the brows and dolorous shake of the head with which he sighed:

"*Helas! my poor fellow, eet ees of not'ing value!*"

Or when they went up with that beaming smile and congratulatory pat on the shoulder with which, having elevated his spectacles on the top of his shining little bald head, he shouted in his cheery, ringing voice:

"*Hey! Sacrebleu! ve are nabob!*"

At such times the "boys" addressed him with due respect as "Monseer lee Savong"—a corruption of "*Monsieur, le Savant*," but among themselves, I am sorry to say, they were so irreverent as to call him "Johnny Crappo" (*Crapaud*), on the plea that it was not "such a thunderin' mouthful."

On the day preceding George Bashford's arrival at Freeze-out Camp—the Monday following the eventful Sabbath when the camp had been electrified by the startling innovation of religious exercises—Colonel Oglethorpe made his appearance just after nightfall, at the head of a small body of horsemen who bore in their midst five still forms, each scored by a bullet from Tiger Dick's revolver. My patient reader will perhaps recall that the Tiger's first bullet, after the pursuit began, was intercepted by a horse tossing its head and purchasing the life of its rider with its own. To that happy accident our gallant colonel owed aching bones—inside a whole skin, however!

The little Frenchman, who came to the door

of his shop when the cavalcade rode up, was first addressed by the colonel, as he swung himself dejectedly from the saddle.

"Monseer, maybe we've got some work for you; maybe it's all past your fixin'. Most of it is, I know. Assay this one first—as white a man as ever died with his boots on!"

And he pointed out Jim Farnsworth.

"*Mon Dieu! mon Dieu! Ze naughty boyee!*" cried M. Carrival, who, a little mixed on the Western idiomatic use of the word "boys," meant to deprecate the warlike proclivities which kept him so busy mending where others had marred.

After a silent examination of Jim Farnsworth, he ordered that he be taken to the hotel and put to bed.

But with the rest a glance sufficed. Over each body he shook his head and said:

"*Non! non!*"

Leaving Colonel Oglethorpe and his companions to tell the story of the tragedy to the miners who were coming in from their various claims to the nightly revel in which the proceeds of their day's toil were consumed—how they had hunted the Tiger until the falling shadow made further search hopeless, the surgeon went to a more critical examination of Jim Farnsworth's wound.

In a few minutes he reappeared, rubbing his hands and chuckling in an evident transport of delight. Rushing up to Colonel Oglethorpe, he seized his hand in both his own, shaking it violently, and crying:

"*Ah! mon ami! mon ami! Merci! grand merci!* (Ah! my friend! Thanks!—great thanks!) How shall I to you ze acknowledgment make? I am youair fraind forever!—youair homebal servant! *Ah, ciel! Vat ees eet zat you bring me! Eet ees ze case beautiful beau-tee fool! ze—ze—Ha! ha!*"

And patting the astonished and bewildered colonel on the back, he rushed into his shop for his case of surgical instruments. Emerging, he caught sight of the Rev. Giles Goddard, seized him by the arm and dragged him into the hotel, without a word of explanation, only crying:

"Come! come! come!"

The miners were now rapidly coming in, and with every accession to the crowd the excitement grew more intense.

In the midst of their planning to form a company of volunteers to scour the country and effect Tiger Dick's recapture, Lightning Joe, with no lack of braggadocio, marched the "tender-feet" into town, bearing between them, on a rude litter, brave Reddy Rolf. Of course, in his own account of the attack Lightning Joe figured as a hero who had tempered valor with discretion. He reported that Nellie Farnsworth had gone over the cliff in the coach.

"My God!" cried Colonel Oglethorpe. "The father in thar at the point of death; the daughter crushed—mangled! And both on the same day! My God! my God!"

And the bystanders seconded him with execrations both loud and deep.

Roaring Reddy Rolf received due attention; and it was arranged for the morrow that a company under Colonel Oglethorpe should go in search of Tiger Dick, while a litter should be sent under the direction of Lightning Joe for the recovery of Nellie Farnsworth's body, if George Bashford and Dilapidated Dan did not make their appearance with it at an early hour.

"When we have put a ring in the nose of this devil, Tiger Dick," suggested Colonel Oglethorpe, "I reckon the next thing in order will be to get together a crowd from Bullion City and Fiddler's Bend, and have a general round up with these road-agents. They've been running loose too long."

When this project had received hearty indorsement, the interest returned to Jim Farnsworth; but all that could be got out of M. Carrival that night, when he appeared and disappeared like a Jack-in-the box, rubbing his hands and chuckling was:

"*Beau-tee-fool! Beau-tee-fool! Ah! my children, you vill bring to me ze fine fellow, Tigair Deek? Ve spoil note ze prince off ze revolver—ze murderair scientee-feek?—rac!—*" indicating the process of hanging by thrusting his thumb up behind his left ear; then shaking his head deprecatingly: "*Non! non! My boyees take ze lesson off him—so? Ciel! ve haff ze paradise off ze surgeon—ze Camp Freeze-out! Go!—go!—bring to me ze fine fellow, Tigair Deek! He iss note barbarian! Go!—go! Ha! ha! Beau-tee-fool!—beau-tee-fool! Ze fine fellow, Tigair Deek!*"

And when they crowded around him with a storm of eager questions, he put them off, shaking his hand above his head and making a trilling sound with his tongue, while he reiterated:

"*T-r-r-r-r! Bring to me ze fine fellow, Tigair Deek!*"

Thus baffled by Johnny Crapaud, the boys "went for" the Rev. Giles Goddard, as soon as he emerged from the chamber of the wounded man. From him they gathered that the little Frenchman's craze of professional operation of lifting the skull where it had been depressed by

Tiger Dick's bullet; and that Jim Farnsworth was already conscious.

At daybreak, Col. Oglethorpe's party started on their man-hunt. Three hours later, George Bashford stood before Fandango Hall, utterly discouraged.

With the flower of the camp gone in quest of revenge, who was left for the work of rescue?

It was the excitement caused by George's story that attracted the Rev. Giles Goddard.

The camp being drained of its best men, the only feasible plan was to go in quest of them; and, without loss of time, George Bashford and Lightning Joe, on a couple of stage hacks that were placed at their disposal, and the Rev. Giles on a horse of his own, set out.

An hour later, M. Carrival was out among the crags, with a portfolio for flowers under his arm and in his hand a little tin box in which he was gathering specimens of rock and mineral, when he met a couple of rough-looking fellows, one of whom lifted his hat with an awkward, slouching bow, and said:—

"I reckon, now, this mought be Monseer lee Savong?"

With a grand sweep of his chapeau and an obeisance which would have graced a Parisian *salon*, M. Carrival, who was never outdone in politeness, said:—

"Messieurs, I have ze honor to be youair obedient servant."

"You're jist the man we're after then," said Boss Kane; for it was he. "Ef so be you could come to one of the boys what's tumbled over a cliff an' bu'sted his arm, I reckon, ef he ain't broke his infernal neck in the bargain."

"Ah! ze boyee! ze boyee!" sighed M. Carrival, shaking his head. "Bote lead ze vay. Et ees ze pleaziar to relieve ze pain. Go! go, Messieurs—I follow."

At a little distance they came upon a man in charge of four horses; and in reply to M. Carrival's look of surprise, Boss Kane addressed him with a decided change of tone and manner.

"Look a-hyar, boss! I reckon you ain't nobody's fool, an it won't be necessary to tell ye that, in this country, when a man gits in a tight box he's got to make the best of it."

"And I am in a—vat you call—'box'?" asked the Frenchman, betraying no uneasiness, but his bead-like little eyes showing that he was losing no "points."

"Waal, that just depends. One way o' takin' us we're civil enough, but ef you *kick*, you'll find us a devilish ornery lot."

"Keek!—keek!" repeated the Frenchman, taking him literally. "Vat shall I keek?"

The road-agent laughed.

"Waal, maybe you'll see before we git through with ye. But jest now it stands us in hand to douse your glim fur a spell."

"Gleem!—gleem!" repeated Monsieur le Savant. "Ah! eet ees ze barbarous *patois*!"

"I mean to put them sharp leetle peepers o' yourn under a blind," explained Boss Kane, producing and folding a silk handkerchief.

"Ah! you will blindfold me?"

"Exactly."

"Zat I see not vere you take me?"

"You bet!"

"*Parbleu!*" said the Frenchman, cheerfully, "ze half of ze adventure!"

"That's the music, Johnny," said the road-agent, approvingly. "I see we're going to make the rifle in handsome style."

M. Carrival submitted quietly to be blindfold, in which state he rode for two hours, having not the slightest idea whither he was being taken.

When the party stopped he was helped to dismount.

"It is the doctor?" asked a woman's voice.

"The doctor," answered his guide, tersely.

He was then led into a house, and the bandage removed.

When he could use his eyes he found himself alone with a mild-eyed woman and his patient, an unconscious, hand-cuffed man.

"*Sacrebleu!*" he cried, forgetting the strange circumstances of his hither-coming in his professional enthusiasm, "eet ees ze fine fellow, Tigair Deek!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE RANGERS' RETREAT.

IN its hurtling descent, after dislodging a huge boulder and sending it cracking to the canyon bottom, the coach snapped the columnar trunk of a pine, to be caught by its stump and arrested on the very brink of the precipice.

From the riven *debris* fair Nellie Farnsworth was drawn like one dead. Blood was on her pale cheek, and her clothes were tumbled and torn, but the expression on her face was one of peace.

A moment later the floundering horses received a new impetus downward, the coach swung round, something gave way, and the whole was precipitated over the cliff.

Seemingly unmoved by what caused his hardest followers to shudder with horror, the silent chief summoned the rest of his men, and the party galloped away, bearing the unconscious maiden to what terrible captivity?

Far up among the almost inaccessible crags they came to a narrow gorge, where a handful

of men might hold an army at bay. Passing the sentinel they found within a glen circumscribed with soaring peaks, where a cluster of rude cabins were embowered in evergreens.

On the doorstep of one of those stood a fat old negress, gay-turbaned, with hoops of native gold depending from her ears, and a kerchief crossed over her ample bosom.

"Dah dey is! Dah's my boys!" she cried, at sight of the returning bandits. "But, fo' de Lo'd! what kind o' plundah is dat 'ah? He! he! he! he! What ye bring de ole aunty dis hyeah time, eh? A gal? He! he! he! he! Oh, dem boys!—dey kill dis chile one o' dese days! He! he! he! he! Oh, Lo'd, hold dis hyeah sinnah fo' she done gone bu'st! He! he! he! he!—he!—he!—he!"

And with her hands on her fat knees, and skaking her head from side to side, the old aunty squeezed the laughter out of her body to the last gasp.

Like most of his fellows, on entering the stronghold the man who bore Nellie Farnsworth before him removed his mask, disclosing the face of a dark-browed Spaniard, not ill-looking, so far as features went, but with a furtiveness that bespoke craft and cruelty. Anselmo del Mornez was more likely to betray a friend than forgive a foe.

"*Caramba!* you have much fun of nothing!" he said, as, having dismounted, he passed the old aunty impatiently by, and bore his captive into the cabin.

Chloe bristled instantly.

"Look hyah, boy!" she cried, "you t'ink I'se bawn in de ma'sh, to be run ober by trash! None yo' lip, now, or I'll—I'll *prod* ye, shore!"

And she brandished a huge fork which she held in her hand.

"Hold on, aunty," cried Boss Kane, leaping from his saddle. "You and Anse are like a couple o' strange cats."

"Dat 'ah Spanish ain't no 'count, nohow!" grumbled Chloe, not placated at all at once. "Look hyah, Marse Kane, what you g'wine to do wid dat 'ah gal? De cap'n's gittin' a gay gallant, I specks, now?"

And a chuckle, beginning somewhere in the internal regions of her stomach, which shook like jelly, soon found its way upward, until it spread her greasy old face in a grin, and bubbled forth in a soft "he! he! he!" rocking her body from side to side as it forced its exit.

For answer, Boss Kane cocked one eye at the old aunty in quizzical fashion, and poked his thumb into her fat side, to receive in return a thwack on the back as from a bear's paw, as, with affected displeasure, Chloe cried:

"G'long wid ye, now!"

But another convulsion of laughter showed that she did not seriously resent the rough pleasantry of this one of her boys.

The room into which she followed Boss Kane, Anselmo having preceded them, contained two long rough pine tables with benches, equally rude, on either side—evidently a dining hall. At the further end was a huge fire-place, with kettles and pans and other culinary utensils. A huge piece of meat on a turn-spit before the fire and a pot that emitted steam in little puffs, not to mention a johnny-cake that was tipped up to brown on top—this last the pride of Aunt Chloe's heart—showed that the good old soul had been preparing to feast her hungry boys, on their return.

From this apartment a door led into a small inner room, where Chloe soon prepared a clean and comfortable bed for the reception of the captive.

Here Nellie Farnsworth awoke to consciousness, to find the old negress bending over her, and hear the outer room ring with a roistering drinking song:

SOLO—"Fill up the pannikin'; tip up the can ag'in!"

CHORUS—"Ho! ro! here's to ye, boys!"

SOLO—"Down goes the whisky that makes us all frisky!"

CHORUS—"Ho! ro! drink, boys, drink!"

The girl sprang upright in bed, wild-eyed and trembling.

"Dah, honey! dat's all right, now. Don't ye worry," began Aunt Chloe, soothingly.

But her voice was drowned in a wild yell and the crash of tin cups beaten on the table.

"Oh! what is that? Where am I? Oh! oh! oh!" cried the affrighted girl, clinging to this one of her own sex who seemed not unkindly.

"Dat? Oh, dat's only de boys. Dey won't hurt ye. Dah, now, lay down ag'in. Lor' bless yer innocent heart! ye ain't—"

"Oh, no! no! no! L-t me up, please. Where are my clothes? I must dress myself."

And in spite of the old aunty's persasions, she got out of the bed all in a panic, and began to huddle on her outer garments.

At this moment there came a boisterous summons from the other room.

"Dat, sab, means me," said Aunt Chloe, and waddled away to her boys.

"Oh, Heaven protect me!" sighed the hapless girl, her trembling fingers almost refusing their accustomed office. "Into what terrible place have I been brought? Alone!—oh, alone! alone! surrounded by these wicked men!"

A moment later aunty entered the room all out of breath.

"Be spy!" she cried. "De cap'n's a-com-in'!"

"Oh, no! no! Keep him out! Do not leave me!" cried the girl, clinging convulsively to the old negress.

Of her own sex, she felt that, however lowly, her presence would be some little protection.

Chloe only laughed.

"Dah! he ain't no spook," she said. "Dey don't ebery gal git sich a gay gallant, now I kin tell ye! But, fo' de Lo'd! ye mustn't keep me hyeah, honey. He'd clip my ole years, ef he ketch me—"

"Oh, I beg of you!—I beseech you! You are a woman!"

"Dah! dah! I done just dat a-way, when I was a gal. But, Lor'! He! he! he! he!"

And convulsed at the recollection of how little sincerity there had been in her maiden coyness, Aunt Chloe disengaged the girl's clinging hands, and backed out of the room.

Almost instantly the Dumb Bandit entered, kicking the door to after him.

Only half dressed, the girl drew a blanket about her shoulders and crouched in a corner of the room, fixing her distended eyes upon her enemy like some timid fawn at bay. How she panted! How she trembled! It seemed as if her fluttering heart must leap from her throat.

But the robber chieftain was unmoved by this abject terror and utter helplessness, as attested the black frown with which he glared at her, standing over her with folded arms.

The man wore a full beard and mustaches, the parts of his face not thus hidden having the dark, Spanish complexion. He was handsome—too handsome for a man—his regular features having a womanly delicacy about them; but his black, blazing eyes proclaimed a spirit far from effeminate.

Those eyes fascinated her. This wordless suspense was more than she could endure. She felt her head swimming. Oh, should her senses leave her, she would be utterly at his mercy! She struggled to conquer the fatal weakness; but she felt herself going! going! Then came swift darkness and oblivion. Under the terrible eye of her implacable foe the girl had swooned!

CHAPTER XIII.

SHADOW JIM AND THE "GREASER."

"BAH, you weakling!" hissed the robber chief. "Your soft, white cheek!—your woman's timidity! Ah! how I *hate* you!"

And he struck the bloodless cheek with the glove which he had removed from one hand.

"And you feared that I sought you from passion," he pursued. "Do all men love your beauty so? Ah! a good idea. Wait!—I may give you over to my most brutal follower. You are a fair subject for my revenge. But I must get *him* first. Then I will *crush* you! Curse your whole race!"

Turning, the bandit left the room and the house, and mounting his horse, rode out of the glen and down the mountain passes at a break-neck pace, muttering to himself in fierce passion.

One man had left the coarse revelry of his companions, and, crouching beneath the window of the room in which the captive was confined, had heard the captain's voice. Later he stood in hiding and watched the chief gallop away.

Then, smiting his breast, wringing his mustache and pacing back and forth in intense excitement, he ground disjointed ejaculations between his teeth.

"*Caramba! Madre de Dios!* I!—Anselmo de Mornez!—I!—I!—I! Ah! death of my soul! It can not be! *Mil diablos!* it shall be!"

And tossing a fold of his serape over his shoulder with a melo-dramatic gesture, he drew a stiletto and stamped his foot.

"My heart is on fire!" he cried. "It shall burn on its chosen altar; or I will drown it in blood!"

A shout of merriment came from the dining-hall.

"Fools! dolts! imbeciles!" cried the Spaniard, shaking his stiletto in their direction. "Eat! drink! hogs that you are! You have eyes that see not. Wait! In good season! Look you! I shall be your *king!* I! Anselmo del Mornez! I!—I! Ha! ha! I!"

Nellie Farnsworth, when she recovered consciousness, was in a pitiable state of terror. She could not eat, though aunty tempted her palate with a piece of golden johnny-cake and a juicy slice of bear-meat. Nor could she be induced to retire to bed, but sat dressed all night, a prey to nameless fears.

On the following day she ate a little; and Aunt Chloe tried to tempt her to a walk in the refreshing mountain air. But fear of those rude bandits kept her a close prisoner in her room.

Later she was attracted to the window by the sound of voices without, and peering through, she discovered at a little distance Anselmo del Mornez and another at play, the game being *monte*.

The manipulator of the cards was one in whom readers of "Tiger Dick, the Faro King,"

[No 29, Dime Library] will recognize his faithful tool, Shadow Jim, whose cunning secured his own escape when his master was "laid by the heels." To new friends he is worthy of an introduction.

A man short in stature and slight of build, with the bloodless emaciation of a confirmed debauchee in early life, liquor had rimmed his eyes with red and given a nervous tremor to his delicate, blue-veined hands. Even the rude dress which he shared in common with his fellows was worn with a certain air, and sat upon him more like a disguise than what his taste would select.

As he canted his head on one side and closed the eyes past which curled the blue smoke from his cigar, the attitude was in keeping with the perfect nonchalance with which he threw the cards.

In marked contrast was the Spaniard, whose whole soul seemed to hang upon the game. As loss succeeded loss, he became more and more reckless, with passionate efforts to retrieve his fortunes, hissing forth curses that seemed as if they must burn his lips.

"*Santissimo Madre de Dios!*" he cried at last, tearing his gaudy serape from his shoulders and casting it upon the ground for a stake. "The lying jade will rob me to the end. This to thee, traitress! I defy thee! *Carajo!* could I but strip Fortune of her mantle as I divest myself, she should stand without a rag. Behold! Oppose what stake you will."

"Keep cool, Johnny," suggested Shadow Jim, with the quiet insolence of one who felt that he belonged to a superior race. "You Greasers are too infernally 'hot inside,' as the Heathen Chinese puts it. If you fellows would wash yourselves once in awhile, and sleep with ice at your head and a warm bottle at your feet, I reckon you could play cards with a white man after a spell."

The Spaniard's black eyes snapped viciously, and he ground a muttered oath between his teeth, but otherwise rested quietly under the insult.

When he lost once more he dashed the offending card to the ground and in ungovernable rage stamped it out of shape in the dirt, fairly howling:

"*Caramba! Carajo. Carrai! Maldita-a-a!* Ah, liar! cheat! sorceress! heretic! defiler of the sanctuary! despoiler of the altar! scoffer at the sacrament! Behold, all the world! Thou, Fate, Fortune, I excommunicate thee! *Anathema! Maranatha!*"

But, not content with this awful curse, delivered with appropriate melodramatic flourishes, he drew his stiletto and plunged it again and again through the now shapeless card, hissing:

"Beast! Swine! Filth! *Car-rr-ramba!*"

Shadow Jim witnessed this exhibition with cool indifference. When the Spaniard had exhausted his fund of indignities, so out of proportion with the bit of cardboard upon which they were heaped, this typical American kicked the serape that he had just won toward its former owner, saying:

"Sonny, you'd better put on your little jacket and run home to your ma, and tell her to take you across her checked apron. As that is your own card, I suppose you have a right to misuse it as you please; but if it belonged to me, I'd kick you into the middle of next week."

Still clutching his stiletto, the Spaniard glared at his insulter.

The latter smiled back at him with sweet serenity.

"Will you take it now, or wait until you get a good chance some time after dark?" he asked.

Anselmo del Mornez "wilted," cursing the *Ameri-anos* in his heart, but careful that none of those pure Castilian compliments passed his lips.

Note the fall of the craven eye before a man. You shall see his brave deportment toward women before this story is done.

To Nellie Farnsworth this scene was full of terror. From the exhausted sleep into which she fell that night she started again and again, dreaming that that devilish Spaniard bent over her with his stiletto at her heart, piercing her soul with his glittering eyes, and scorching her cheek with his breath, as he hissed his wild oaths into her ear.

Seeing her so pale, Aunt Chloe again, on this third day of her captivity, urged her charge to walk in the open air.

"De boys is all right," was her earnest assurance. "Dey won't hurt ye. Why, bress yer dear heart, honey! I's a lone woman-critter 'mong 'em dese two years, an' dey don't shine up to de ole aunty. He! he! he! he!"

And hugely amused at the absurdity of contrasting herself with Nellie in this respect, she wrestled with the imps of mirth until the tears rolled down her fat cheeks.

"Sides, I'll go 'long wid ye, honey. An' I reckon de best of 'em won't tackle de ole aunty. I broke 'em in two, ef dey go to cuttin' up rusty whah I is!"

And as she squared her brawny arms she looked equal to the threat.

Thus protected, Nellie ventured forth.

Clinging close to Aunt Chloe's side, her star-

led eyes scanned every one of the bandits that they encountered.

Some were engaged with cards; some lounged in groups, entertaining each other with stories of questionable delicacy; some sat apart in unsocial solitude, perhaps with the companionship of a pipe, or employed at mending saddle or bridle, or cleaning their weapons; one was scraping on a fiddle, to which another executed surprising steps.

Their glances at Nellie betrayed bold, undisguised admiration; but no one molested her in any way.

Aunt Chloe was saluted with banter, which she returned in kind.

One impressed Nellie more vividly than all the rest. It was Anselmo del Mornez. The Spaniard was walking by himself with folded arms, seemingly in deep abstraction. When she encountered his eye the girl was thrilled with a vague fear, as if he were watching to prevent her escape.

"Oh, let us return to the house!" she whispered, and would have flown like a frightened bird.

But at that moment, from a distance, yet multiplied in all directions by the echoing crags, so that Nellie could not locate it, came a loud, explosive sound that electrified the moody Spaniard into spasmodic life.

"To arms!—to horse!—Free Rangers to the rescue!" he shouted. "*Caramba!* are we as the stones immovable? *Vamonos!*"

Instantly the idle lounging camp was transformed into a scene of hurrying confusion.

Startled, bewildered, thrilled with the thought that her friends must have penetrated to her prison, Nellie Farnsworth's instant impulse proved her innate heroism. How could she best second their efforts to effect her rescue? Where were they, that she might rush off to them? "*Them*" in her thought meant chiefly George Bashford; for of course the rest must be under his leadership. She had feared that the rash act of devotion by which he had given Roaring Reddy the one chance of bearing her from the midst of her enemies had cost him his life. But now one of the greatest burdens that had weighed down her spirits was suddenly lifted. He lived!—to again hazard his life for her!

But at this moment her arm was grasped by a not gentle hand, and a voice that swamped the new-born hope in a sea of despair cried:

"*Caramba!* To the house! to the house! And, you, thou daughter of Cush!—guard the prisoner with thy life!"

Helpless to resist, Nellie was hurried forward into the house, Aunt Chloe seizing her other arm, plainly so eager to secure her charge that she forgot to resent the cavalier tone in which the Spaniard reminded her of her duty and the penalties of neglecting it.

"Oh God!" was the cry of the prisoner's palpitating heart—"Thou that holdest all things in the hollow of thy hand, if it be thy will, deliver me now from mine enemies!"

CHAPTER XIV.

JACK MUSGRAVE'S DAUGHTER.

MONSIEUR LE SAVANT had done his work, pronouncing Tiger Dick's arm not even broken. A nerve had been injured, producing temporary paralysis; but his extreme debility was due to loss of blood from severed arteries.

"*Crie! erac! Von, two, tree day!* Behold, he make vonce more ze vound beautiful!"

The effusive gratitude of the woman and her promise that no harm should come to him, while the reward of his services should repay ten-fold the inconvenience to which he had been subjected, the Frenchman had deprecated with bowing, shrugging, finger-spreading and grimacing without stint, and a perfect avalanche of verbal protestations.

"Oh, no! no! no! no! no! no! Ze *sha-a-arm-ing* adventure! ze privilege to bring ze happiness to ma'm'selle, vat shall no longair be doioereus! Ah, ciel! to behold ze fine fellow, Tigair Deek—ze prence of ze revolevair!"

He, once more blindfold, had been led away by the dark-browed robber lieutenant.

Alone, the woman crept back to the bedside of the man she loved so passionately.

His eyes fluttered open; regarded her dreamily, without recognition or quickening interest, while she waited in breathless suspense; then slowly closed with the languor of utter exhaustion; and he lapsed into a deep, life-giving sleep.

Thereupon the woman sunk upon her knees, and lifting her clasped hands and tear-streaming eyes to Heaven, whispered in an ecstasy of gratitude:

"Great God, I thank Thee!"

Hour after hour she watched faithfully, until his eyes opened upon her with the light of recognition in them.

"Is it—can it be you, Barbara?" he asked.

"Yes, Dick," she replied, very gently, with a soft color struggling in her cheek and a shy veiling of the eyes behind their long lashes, to hide the tremulous tenderness and the longing she feared he might discover in spite of her.

"But how in the world?" he began; when she

put her cool palm on his hot forehead and interposed:

"Not yet, please. Wait until to-morrow. You will be better then; and—"

"Don't baby me," he interrupted, in his turn. "I'm a little feverish, of course, with this confounded wound; but I don't take kindly to gruel and camphor, as you will learn, if you propose to shoulder the job of pulling me out of this hole."

"I do propose it, Dick," said the girl, with a sudden brightening of the eye.

"All right, my dear," replied the Tiger, with his off-hand nonchalance, not noticing that the term of affection let fall so carelessly from his lips caused her eyes to drop again. "Begin, then, by telling me—where I am, how I came here, how you came here, how long I have been here, whether anybody—that is to say, any enemy knows I am here; where is old man Musgrave, your respected progenitor?—how is the old fellow?—how soon will he be here?—what has brought the pair of you into this part of the world?—what has happened since—"

"Stop, Dick!—stop, for God's sake!" cried the girl, checking the flow of his light questions. "A great deal has happened since we saw each other away off there on the Pacific Slope."

"Eh? Why, Barbara, my girl!" exclaimed the Tiger, struck by the pain in her face and voice.

"Dick," she cried, for the moment forgetting her shyness, and hardening with that vengeful hatred which made her grief unwomanly, "you'll never see father again!"

"No!—no!—don't tell me that!" exclaimed Tiger Dick, with a touch of genuine regret. "He was the best friend I ever had."

"And the *only* one I ever had!" sobbed the orphan, a wave of wretchedness sweeping over her.

"But how—"

She did not wait for the conclusion of the question.

"He was murdered—*butchered!*" she cried, her eyes again blazing and her nostrils dilating. "He left me this legacy—to *come back* at the man who cleaned him out! I've been laying for him with the cards stocked; and"—her voice becoming hoarse and unwomanly with concentrated passion—"when we meet, I'll deal him a hand that will set him for all he's worth!"

Thought the Tiger privately:—

"I don't covet his enjoyment of your ill-will, my beauty!"

Aloud he asked:—

"Who is the man?"

"JAMES FARNSWORTH!" announced the girl, with terrible deliberateness.

The Tiger started, recurring to that face veiled by the smoke from his pistol.

"Tell me all about it," he said, quietly.

Sitting, or rather crouching, on a low stool, with her wild eyes set and staring straight before her, her hands spasmodically clasping her knees, and her body swaying restlessly back and forth, while her black hair, falling straight on either side of her white face, streamed over her shoulders like an ebon mane, she looked like a half-demented creature, yet crowned with the wild beauty of some barbarian queen.

"Whatever he was to others," she said, "to me he was as tender a father as any one need to be blessed with. Ah! he loved me! Why, when he took to the road, refusing to let me go with him and share his perils and hardships, he would come miles and miles in the night and storm, through a country where every man's hand was against him, just to see that I was safe and well and wanted for nothing."

"I lived alone in the woods, a mile from the nearest house. Everybody shunned Jack Musgrave's daughter. But I was glad of that. It left me freer to see the one who was more to me than all the world."

"But, oh! the price of this, my one happiness! My God! it cost his life in the end!"

"It was suspected that he visited me; and then every approach to my cabin was ambushed by the miserable coyotes who dared not meet a brave man face to face in fair fight."

"Late one afternoon, while gathering berries, I discovered a man lurking in the bushes. Was it instinct that told me *why* he was there? I kept on with my work, not to let him see that I had detected him; but I thought that my heart would suffocate me. I knew that no one man would dare to hunt Jack Musgrave alone. In that man I recognized one of Jim Farnsworth's Vigilantes; and his presence denoted twenty or thirty more hidden all about me, lying in wait for my father's life!"

"What could I do? How could I warn him? I would have crept miles upon miles over jagged rocks on my bare knees, to get to him! But, besides not knowing where to go, I dared not betray a sign which would show that I was expecting him that night."

"When my basket was full, I returned home, swinging it carelessly and singing, as I was in the habit of doing. My God! with my heart bursting, with every drop of blood in my body turned to ice with fear, I sung if I were happy!"

"And like an ominous answer to my quavering voice came the rumble of distant thunder, a black cloud-pall swept across the sky, the wind

moaned, the trees writhed as if in pain, and the rain fell like tears.

"Oh! how can I tell you the agony of that suspense, as I sat in the darkness and waited! waited! waited!—counting the seconds, while my teeth chattered and every muscle in my body quivered with dread, and at every chance sound my heart threatened to leap from my throat?"

"How I strained my ears to listen, though I knew he would not come for hours yet. How I racked my dizzy, aching brain for some expedient by which to warn him. But I was so crushed by terror that my thoughts went round and round in one hopeless circle. I could but drop my face into my lap and sob in utter, helpless misery."

"Oh! the cruel fate, that withheld from me until it was too late the thought for which I had groped blindly, despairingly. It came to me at last like a flash of lightning—I might set the cabin on fire! He would know that would attract others, and so be on his guard."

"I sprung up, wild with the idea, knowing that there was not a moment to lose, as it must be near eleven o'clock, at which time he usually arrived. I groped for the matches."

"At this moment I was petrified by a sound which rose clear and sharp above the noises of the storm—the report of fire-arms! Then came yells, more shots, and the mad hubbub of deadly strife."

"No more waiting, now! No precaution of mine could serve him longer! I must out and fight for him! That thought shot a thrill of mad elation up through the agony of knowing that I was too late to save him from the deadly peril of that murderers' ambush."

"I had had my pistols in readiness for this all through that age of waiting anguish. I tore open the door, and rushed bareheaded into the night. The wind clutched at my garments; the rain pelted with blinding force in my face; the lightnings tried to terrify me with their glare; the thunder roared its savage menace. Did I heed them?—all the powers of earth and heaven? Gods! I would have rushed through the fires of hell, to gain his side and stand shoulder with him against his—nay, our cowardly enemies!"

"Now there were no more shots, but a Babel of hoarse voices calling to each other. Had he escaped them? I could have shrieked my delight! But, then, had he—could he be—No! no!—*perish the thought!* Besides, the continued excitement showed that the hunters were at fault."

"Then I heard some one approaching along the path down which I was rushing. I leaped aside and waited with my pistols in readiness. They might kill me afterward; but I was resolved to shoot any enemy who crossed my path that night. Were they not seeking his life? Was I not his child—a part of him who gave me being? Was it not as justifiable to fight in his defense as in self-defense? Not that I thought of these things then, I only knew that the Vigilantes were on one side, and my father and I on the other. That was enough."

"The wind that had pulled my hair down, now blew it damp and clinging across my face. I tore it aside. The man was just upon me. I could hear him pant. He seemed to stumble unsteadily. He groaned!—not weakly, but through clinched teeth. Oh God! that sound pierced my heart like a poisoned dagger!"

"Was it—could it be—"

"Father!" I gasped—"father, is that you?"

CHAPTER XV.

A MISSION OF REVENGE.

"THANK God!—my little Barby!"

"Those are his words, gasped from his dear lips with his heart's blood, that dripped upon my dress as I held him in my arms."

"How I shivered with a nameless terror! How I choked with a wild despair, so that I could only gasp:

"Oh, father! Oh, father!"

"Help me to the house," he said. "I only allowed to reach you before I passed in my checks. I wanted to be with my little girl then. That's all I asked."

"Then mad rage swelled my heart almost to bursting."

"Father," I cried, "they sha'n't touch you—not one of them! I'll kill every man that dares to cross the threshold!"

"No use, my pretty," he said. He always called me that when he loved me most! "It's all up. Jim Farnsworth has given me my quietus. They're coming! Only help me indoors. I want to die like a Christian. And then I've got a word to say to you."

"Then came a glare of lightning, and showed me his face—a bloody horror, all white and drawn with anguish! Great God! how did I look upon it without being struck blind forever?"

"Did it drive me mad? I don't know! Half carrying him—him, my God! who an hour before could have slain an ox with his fist! Oh, God! Oh, God! He never reached the house. He did not die in bed, like a Christian, as he said. He stumbled, he fell, dragging me to the ground. I would have tried to lift him, to drag him to shelter; but he stopped me."

"No use, Barby," he said. "I'm done. Let me die here in peace."

"Let him die there?—there, in the mud and rain, like a dog in the kennel! My father? Him I loved—who loved me so? He had died for me! Coming to my arms, he had rushed upon the assassin's bullet!"

"In that moment I could have cursed the God who added this poignancy to my wretchedness. I rent my hair—I tore the dress from my bosom, so that the chill rain might beat upon my hot heart. Let the cruel tempest assail me, but spare him in his dying moments! Then I cast myself upon his poor body, to shield it. And the torrents swept down upon us; the winds roared and shrieked around us; the trees writhed and lashed their giant limbs; the black darkness was cleft by gleaming, hissing lightning; the hollow heavens bellowed with detonating thunder that rocked the shuddering earth! My God! what a night!"

"Somehow he made me understand the mission he left me—where to find his band of followers, and to instruct them to avenge his death. He gave me the pass-word which would show them that I came commissioned by him."

"Then he had but time to kiss me with lips that left his life-blood on mine; to call me little Barby, his pretty, whom he loved doubly, for her mother's sake and for her own; and I knew that our enemies were upon us—the gleam of a dark lantern; a cry of surprise, ending in a yell of triumph that brought them all crowding to the spot."

"I cannot describe the struggle that followed! I know that I fired into the black darkness, determining my aim by the bull's-eyes that hid my enemies while they flooded us with light. A cry of pain and rage showed that not all my bullets went astray. Then I sprung among them, striking right and left with a bowie."

"I suppose I was crazy for the time."

"I did not feel the bullet that was fired at me, tearing its way through my arm. Some one shouted:

"Knife the wildcat!"

"He was about to act upon his own words, when Jim Farnsworth shouldered him aside and seized me, crying:

"Remember, boys, it's a woman, and she's fighting for her own father. I reckon no true man will blame her for that."

"He—he who had given my father his death shot—whom I hated with the hate of hell!—he interposed to protect me! Rather would I have died a thousand deaths than owe my life to his bloody hand!"

"I struggled as I had never struggled before. I cursed him. I tore his flesh with my teeth. But he overpowered me—disarmed me—bound me so that I could offer no further resistance."

"Better for him had he let me die then. He was sparing the hand that will yet wring his heart dry, exacting requital for a father's blood, drop for drop!"

"Some one shouted:

"While you're wasting time on the huzzy, this man will die before we can rope him!"

"So implacable was their hate! Death was not enough; they must sate their vengeance with torture, ignominy."

"Take her away," commanded their chief; but the executioners were so eager that their victim should not slip from their clutches through the gates of death, that the rope was adjusted about his neck before I could be borne from the spot."

"I never saw him after that; but on his grave I swore to leave vengeance to no alien hand. I, his child, would exact the penalty to the last jot and tittle!"

"As a woman, I was helpless; as a man—and would not my undying hate eke out in the spirit what I might lack in the body?—as a man I could mold other men to my purposes, and so meet my enemy on something like a fair footing."

"What will you think of me, if in the face of this great mission I acknowledge one womanly weakness? It was not all vanity, though. My father had loved my hair—had kissed it and caressed, and even hallowed it with tears of as pure a love as man ever bore woman. From earliest girlhood he had insisted upon every care being given to its training, telling me that it made me look so like the young wife he had lost after a year-long honeymoon—the mother I had never known!"

"The Mexican costume would obviate the necessity of sacrificing this, by enabling me to hide it beneath a silk handkerchief. Thus I presented myself to the band as a son whom their chief had invested with his authority, adding the duty of avenging him. That my woman's voice might not betray my sex I was forced to reveal myself to the lieutenant, who alone knew anything of my father's domestic life; and through him the rest were informed that I had bound myself by oath never to speak to any one but him—he being excepted, of course, from the necessities of the case—until I shouted my triumph in Jim Farnsworth's ears. This romantic pledge accorded with their rude fancies and indeed aided my ascendancy over them by making me a hero in advance."

"I, then, am the Dumb Bandit. One by one the men who were engaged in my father's murder have fallen, until only Jim Farnsworth, the chief, is left. He escaped me by going to the States in quest of you. I knew that he must return this way. Here I have lain in wait for him. He cannot pass through my line of spies undiscovered. One blow more, and my murdered father can lie in peace. I wait as the bride awaits her lord—as the miser spreads his trembling arms to clasp a new legacy of gold—as the famished wretch clutches the life-bearing cup!"

"But do you think that this unnatural life has not its moments of horrible torture? I am a woman!"

Again that piteous cry with which she had vainly appealed to Heaven from the summit of the mountain.

"Could I not at intervals hide myself here and resume my proper character, I believe I should go mad. I bless that instinct, now, since it brought me to your relief!"

Her great love for the man forced these words from her lips, and spoke as well through her eyes, before she was aware. Then she hurried on:

"But you—you of whom Jim Farnsworth went in pursuit—mauled, wounded, wandering alone in the mountains! Need I tell you what thoughts have shaken my soul?"

And by the struggle between her rioting passions and the repression of her will, Tiger Dick knew what this woman had sacrificed in remaining to watch patiently by his bedside.

"Wait," he said, trying to break the shock of the revelation he was now forced to make.

"Curb your expectations. The things we most long for in this life are often denied us. What a mocking devil must rule our destinies!" he added, his face darkening with bitterness.

"But—Farnsworth?" cried the woman, in her eagerness, slipping to her knees from the stool on which she had sat, and clutching the bed-clothes. "He was with you? You escaped from him?"

"He was with me," admitted the Tiger.

That was enough. Jack Musgrave's daughter sprung to her feet before he could go on.

"But," he pursued, meaningly, "in the game we played it is give and take; and before I got away he had his share of the hard knocks."

At that the girl's strength seemed to give out all at once. She sat down again abruptly, as if she would have fallen else. She did not ask for more explicit statement; but only looked at him with a hysterical catching of the breath.

"Jim Farnsworth won't trouble anybody much more in this world," added the Tiger.

Then she knew it all. She dropped her face into her lap, flung her apron over her head, and sat without sound or motion, save the tremor that shook her in every limb.

A day passed, Barbara Musgrave made no further reference to the fate that had taken her long-cherished revenge out of her hands. That other master-passion, more powerful than even her hate, turned the edge of her disappointment. With magical potency it was softening all her nature. Never was more tender, womanly nurse than she who now watched beside Tiger Dick, reluctant to take necessary sleep, save as he compelled her to.

When he slept, then she hung over him, all worshipful. Then she could loose the rein and give her love free course. Then her cheeks flushed; then her eyes glowed; then the sweet languor of tenderness stole over her and lent soft, pliant grace to every movement. Then she touched—as lightly as ever zephyr kissed the dimpling sea—his hand, his cheek, his hair; and felt the subtle thrill of ecstasy! Once the longing of her heart mastered caution, and she bent until her lips touched his.

At this bold assault of love his eyes opened full upon her face!

She started back with a cry of dismay. Then came a bitter, despairing defiance. She stood before him with a face as white as marble, her arms rigid at her sides, her hands clinched hard. No shame there! Her head was carried as high as that of any queen. Her eyes dared him to mock the love she had given him unsought.

Tiger Dick was moved with a profound admiration. He had never seen a woman so wildly, so barbarously beautiful as this one. Not that he loved her; but she pleased him, perhaps more than any other woman ever had before. He saw his power over her. He formed a sudden resolve.

He said nothing, but only looked at her, throwing into his face an expression of glad surprise and wooing tenderness.

Under the fascination of that look her muscles began to relax. The color came back to her cheek, not steadily, but fluttering, like the flight of a frightened bird. Her troubled eyes questioned his.

"Barbara!"

He but breathed the name; yet it echoed and re-echoed through the chambers of her soul, a sweet, intoxicating music that she had never heard before. Now she was shaken by gusty sweeps of emotion. Her lips worked; her

fingers writhed in the folds of her dress; she was blinded by a sudden rush of tears; she was dizzy and faint.

"Need I tell you, Barbara," he said, in soft, gliding accents, "that I have loved you far, far back in—"

Now she dashed the tears from her eyes—bent toward him with her trembling hands pressed hard upon her tempest shaken bosom—devouring his face with burning eyes—panting, gasping:

"Dick! Dick!"

A prayer and a charge that he deceive her not in this, where her heart-treasures lay—in which her soul was wrapped up!

He smiled; he extended his hand; he breathed her name again—reassuringly—woolingly.

"Barbara!"

Then she yielded herself to the sweeping flood of this wild happiness. With a scream of ecstasy, she swooped down upon him and clutched him as some tigress. Her arms clasped him; her face was buried in his breast; and her frame was shaken by such a storm of sobs as few men ever witness. Let him beware who occasions them in such a nature!

But Tiger Dick took no thought of the power he had awakened, save that it intoxicated him. Who among men was ever so loved before? Few!—few!

But what of the jealousy of which this was the complement? Ah! that found no place in his picture of the future. How in that moment could he think that his capricious fancy would ever prefer another to this magnificent creature? He stroked her glorious hair, and let it fall across his lips.

At that supreme moment came an interruption as terrible as it was sudden. There was a crash of shivering glass, as a dark body was propelled through the window, to strike the floor with a thud; and the next instant Barbara Musgrave's mastiff and a dog fully as large were writhing in the center of the room in deadly conflict.

With a wrench the woman tore herself from the very embrace of love, and sprung erect. She took in the scene at a glance. No need of the sound of voices and hurrying footsteps without. She knew that this new-found heaven was threatened with invasion. She turned at bay, a beautiful fury. Through her passionate soul swept the thought:

"Not the powers of earth, nor of heaven, nor of hell, shall tear from me, as my father was torn, this, my love, my god!"

CHAPTER XVI.

A BLOODY CLEW.

As none of the three had any experience in trailing, it is perhaps not surprising that, instead of finding Col. Oglethorpe and his men, the little party who set out in quest of them lost themselves. At nightfall, after the most wretchedly discouraging day of his life, George Bashford was confronted by his guardian angel in the person of Dilapidated Dan.

"Ex-coose me, cunnell!" he said, as he crept into the disconsolate little camp, and stood like a culprit before his judges; "but ef so be you've got a bite fur a hungry man—"

"You may have all that you want to eat," said George, impatiently; "but if you wish to stay in this camp you must keep your mouth shut."

Dilapidated Dan ate his supper in humble silence, and during the entire evening sat obediently mute, while the others discussed their bitter disappointment of the day and the no more hopeful prospect of the morrow. Though George was awake all night with anxiety, Dan slept like a top. In the morning he presented himself with a military salute and the stereotyped:

"Ex-coose me, cunnell!"

"Well, what do you want now?" demanded George.

"Arter follerin' ye all day yistiddy, I allow as how ye're a leetle mixed in yer hearin's. Ef so be ye'd let me to suggest that ye're all out, lookin' fur Col. Oglethorpe in this hyar direction—"

"What do you know of Col. Oglethorpe's whereabouts?"

"Waal, I reckon as how I could spot him in about two hours an' a half, bein's as how thar ain't but one outlet to the pass what I seen him go into yistiddy mornin'."

"And, knowing where he was, you followed us about all day!" cried George, his voice showing the keenness of his disappointment; "and not a word last night!"

"Ex-coose me, cunnell!" pleaded the old bummer, in deep humility. "Didn't you say 'dry up' last night? The wic—"

"Stop! stop!" cried George, choking with rage. "Lead us at once, and without delay, to Col. Oglethorpe."

But Dilapidated Dan stood his ground, in deeper humility, if possible, yet firmly.

"Ex-coose me, cunnell! Thar's one other leetle matter—"

"Well! well! out with it!"

And the old bummer did "out with it," literally, the "it" being his old black bottle, which he held up to view bottom upward and with the cork drawn, while he fixed upon George's face a

look of piteous appeal and breathless anxiety that must have convulsed him with laughter, had not his heart been so wrung with pain.

Without a word George handed the suppliant his own flask, and Dilapidated Dan was himself again! Within half an hour the reappearance of his hiccoings, the absence of which my attentive reader may have noticed, bore testimony that he had not neglected his new acquisition. None the less true was he to his word, however; for, at the end of the stipulated time, he brought his party in sight of those they sought.

The first day's man-hunt had been wholly fruitless, even Col. Oglethorpe being forced to admit, after he had exhausted every subtlety of mountain craft, that it was simply impossible to follow a trail over that rocky ground.

But chance came to their aid, and ere half the morning of the second day was over they were grouped in excited speculation over a bloody handkerchief that had been found.

"He was jest dandy enough to sport that molly-coddle nose-rag!" said Col. Oglethorpe, holding it up contemptuously between his finger and thumb—a fine linen handkerchief striking the western sense as effeminate.

It was at this moment that George Bashford came upon the scene.

"A woman's handkerchief?—and with her blood on it?" he cried, jumping at once to the conclusion suggested by his fears, "It must be hers—Miss Farnsworth's. Let me see if there is a mark on it."

And in his excitement forgetting the necessity of making himself known, he would have taken it from Col. Oglethorpe with more abruptness than ceremony, but that that hardy knight of the mountains held it beyond his reach in one hand and repelled him not over-gently with the other, regarding him with a stare of surprise that would have brought most men to their senses, without the metallic ring in the voice with which he said:

"Not so fresh, my Christian friend! And who the devil may you happen to be?"

But the Rev. Giles Goddard quickly adjusted the matter by an introduction; and Col. Oglethorpe at once yielded the handkerchief to George's inspection, saying with his wonted off-hand cordiality:

"Oh! that's all right, of course. Beg pardon, Mr. Bashford. Shake, sir—shake!"

But the handkerchief bore no marks; and, furthermore, Col. Oglethorpe declared that it would be of no service since it was as impossible to follow the trail from that point as from where Tiger Dick had been last seen.

At that George uttered a cry of rage and despair.

"But we must follow it—we must!" was his unreasonable, yet perfectly natural, rebellion against the fate that seemed determined to baffle him at every point.

"Must and can don't always run to the same hand," said the colonel, his figure drawn from the card-table.

In this dilemma Dilapidated Dan once more came "to the fore."

"Ex-coose—(hic!)—ex-coose me, cunnell!"

"What!—Dan? Why, old man, haven't you kept rather shady of late? And where did you drop from just now?" asked the colonel, who had not noticed the old bummer as he came up.

Dilapidated Dan saluted a *la militaire*, with his eyes half closed and a drunken smile on his flabby old face, while his body pitched and rolled like a vessel in a chopping sea.

"The victim of adverse circumstances, the foot-ball—"

"Oh! this is insufferable trifling!" interrupted George Bashford, whose usually even temper had yielded to the combined influence of pain, disappointment, suspense and lack of proper food and sleep.

"Hold on!" expostulated Col. Oglethorpe, coolly. "You don't know Dilapidated Dan yet. He ain't such a fool as he looks. I'll back the old rascal to that extent. Give him a show, and you'll find that he don't often wag his jaws without saying something. Ef everybody I know had as much tune to their chip-music—waal, talk wouldn't be so cheap and whisky would knock off a cent or two on a glass."

In grateful recognition of this indorsement old Dan carried two fingers to the cracked and battered visor of his cap, and then bent upon George a pleading look which seemed to ask:—

"Kin the colonel say more?"

Seeing that George was not altogether won over, he addressed himself to Col. Oglethorpe. "Ef so be ye'll resk a chip ur two on the wer—(hic!)—weracity of a wanquished veteran in the great battle," he said, "the ole man kin tell ye whar ye kin git a blood-hound what'll—"

"A hound?—a hound?" interrupted George, in his eagerness springing forward and seizing the old bummer by the arm.

"That ain't no lie!" urged the "veteran," prompt in the defense of his "weracity."

"A hound," repeated George, "which can follow where no trace is visible. Thank God! she is saved! Out with it, old man. Where is this hound to be had?"

"A galoot from South—Chic 5—South Carolina runs the critter; an' he's bunkin' at Hank Kidder's while—"

"Yes! yes! Where is this Kidder's?"

Every man in the crowd knew; and all volunteered to go in the same breath. But George silenced their Babel.

"Tell me where to go," he said, excitedly.

"I will be back in half the time."

"You can't miss the road; and you can take my horse—it's better than the one you have—if you insist on going yourself," said the colonel.

George had accepted his offer and sprung from the saddle to make the exchange before the words were fairly out of his mouth.

A word of direction was sufficient, as it was straight down the stage road.

As George gathered the bridle-rein and was about to plunge the spur rowel-deep into the flank of his horse, he stopped with a sudden thought—a lightning suspicion. In one way or another Dilapidated Dan had been constantly instrumental in checking his pursuit of Nellie Farnsworth's abductor. Here was another delay—seemingly in furtherance of the desired object, but still a delay, which would give the enemy precious time. Was there treachery back of it all? What was the mystery of his sudden flight from Fawn-eyed Fan? Was it but a subterfuge, to get away so that he could go and warn somebody?

On the impulse, George bent forward and whispered in Col. Oglethorpe's ear.

"Keep an eye on that old rascal. Don't let him escape before I get back. I cannot explain my suspicions now. Only keep an eye on him!"

Then he plied the spur and dashed away.

CHAPTER XVII.

RUN TO EARTH.

BUT at the moment of starting the Rev. Giles Goddard rode to George's side and said, quietly:—

"I will accompany you, if you please. If one horse fails, we will have another to rely on."

Making their way to the stage-road, they never drew rein until their horses stood panting and in a lather of sweat before Hank Kidder's cabin.

The master of the hound was found idly balancing himself on the hitching bar and poking a stick into the ground—a long, lank, loose-jointed individual, with a complexion suggestive of "chills and fever," hair falling neglected to his shoulders and appearing in an exceedingly scanty growth on his chin, foul with tobacco juice that was let to dreul carelessly from the corners of his mouth. An old straw hat, a hickory shirt and butternut trousers, suspended by a piece of listing over one shoulder, and rough cow-hide boots, completed the picture of a representative "pore white."

"The hound!" he said lazily, in answer to George's eager question of proprietorship, looking down at the animal which crouched at his feet. "Waal, yes—that thar's my pet. Raised him from a pup. We've eat together an' slep' together; an' as for runnin' down nigs—Hal hal! See how he knows the word!"—for the animal had quickly cocked up one eye at its master's face. "We hain't had no sich fun lately—eh, Tige?"

As George explained his errand in a torrent of rapid words Lanky Luke seemed to take fire, like a fox-hound at the sound of a horn.

"The devil you say!" was his excited ejaculation, and, his laziness suddenly vanishing, he dashed off after one of Hank Kidder's horses.

Then transpired the real reason of the minister's joining George's ride.

"I saw you carrying a lady this morning. May I ask if she was seriously hurt?"

George turned to the speaker with a blank look of questioning. Then, suddenly recovering himself, he replied:

"Oh, yes. A stranger to me. I found her clinging to some bushes where she had fallen over a cliff, and succeeded in saving her. I think she received no injury beyond the fright and exhaustion."

"Thank you."

Thereupon the subject was dropped—and forgotten by one of the speakers!

On the way back a new anxiety oppressed George Bashford. He had a presentiment which kept deepening and deepening, that he would find Dilapidated Dan escaped. That was his first question when he dashed up to Col. Oglethorpe's party.

"Dan, Dan?" repeated the leader, looking around. "He's—Waal, I'll be blowed! I saw him right hyer a moment ago curled up asleep. Hang me if I don't believe the rascal has given me the slip after all."

"A minute ago?" repeated George anxiously.

"Waal, now, I can't just say. It might be an hour ago—maybe more. Ye see, he was asleep; so I thought he was all right."

"It is a plot!" cried George, excitedly. "That old scoundrel is a traitor—doubtless in league with the road-agents. He suggested the hound to delay us while he warned his fellows. Come! we have not a minute to lose!"

The hound was forthwith put on the scent, Lanky Luke following him on foot, and re-

straining him with a leash. Excited by this new feature in the chase the bordermen followed after.

At the point where a small ravine led from the pass which they were traversing the animal gave an unexpected bound, which freed him from his master's hold, and shot forward like the wind.

"Come on! We're directly upon them!" shouted Lanky Luke, no trace of laziness about him now.

"Stand aside!" cried George; and digging his spurs into his horse's flanks, he forced his way into the ravine ahead of all the rest, nearly riding Lanky Luke down.

It was a wild scramble up that rocky defile, which, from its appearance, promised nothing but a blind pocket; but at the end they discovered a log cabin almost concealed by foliage, from which issued the sounds of a terrific combat between two animals.

The door was abruptly thrown open, its rude casement framing the figure of a woman, grandly, terribly beautiful, with eyes that burned like living flames, and a great mane of ebony hair streaming over her shoulders that gave her the appearance of some Boadicea or Brunhild of old.

Her white, repellent face, even more than the pistols she presented, caused George to draw rein abruptly as she cried:

"Halt! Halt, I say! Who are you that rush upon the home of a lone woman as if you were storming a garrison? Do you think that in this lawless country I am without means of defense? Stand where you are until I know your errand. The man who advances does so at the peril of his life! Are you hunting slaves that you send your hound before you? You have sent him to the right place to find his match. You may have his carcass back in a few minutes. *At him, Wolf! Tear him, Wolf!*" she cried over her shoulder, in encouragement to her mastiff.

Even as she spoke the sounds of conflict suddenly ceased. One dog had evidently got the other by the throat. The struggle which was renewed from time to time, growing fainter with each repetition, showed that one was fast losing strength.

Thus far the man-hunters had stood silent, awed by that sudden apparition, and listening to the sounds of that invisible death struggle. Lanky Luke was the first to break the spell. With a cry of rage he sprang forward to the assistance of his pet.

The pistol in Barbara Musgrave's left hand exploded; and Lanky Luke fell upon his face before he had passed a rod in advance of the halted column.

"Forward, men! We have run them to earth! This woman is but a blind! Forward I say!"

Ere the words were out of his mouth, George Bashford's horse had carried him half-way to the house. But a shot from Barbara Musgrave's right-hand pistol toppled him headlong from the saddle.

With a howl of rage his followers pressed after.

Then came the clear, ringing appeal:

"Stop! stop! You know not the death you are rushing upon!"

They did not heed.

They saw the woman reach inside the doorway. Then came a roar, as if the mountain had burst asunder. From the overhanging cliff fell a huge boulder into the ravine, between the assailants and the cabin, just clearing George Bashford's body, the impetus of his charge having hurled him upon the very doorstep, where he lay unconscious, while that terrible missile plowed its course down the ravine over the mangled bodies of horses and men!

CHAPTER XVIII.

A WOMAN'S BRAVE BATTLE.

ALL the mad fire of Barbara Musgrave's passionate nature was aroused. She whose dying father had been torn from her arms to be hanged like a dog was now to defend this other whom she loved—ay, worshiped!—from a similar fate.

She was fully prepared to repel an assault on her isolated abode. She had but to pull a string, to set off a mine which sent that death-dealing boulder crashing down the narrow defile, and at the same time shot a bomb far up into the sky, to explode and fill the air with a myriad of pyrotechnic serpents, an unmistakable sign by night or by day, while crag and canyon for miles around quivered with the sharp concussion.

Then she swung to the puncheon door, secured it at top and bottom with heavy oaken bars, and closed the window with a shutter.

A dim light was still admitted to the room through narrow loopholes, which showed that the house had been constructed so as to withstand a siege.

Barbara Musgrave's first act, when roused to a knowledge of the threatened assault, had been to plunge a bowie hilt-deep into the side of Lanky Luke's hound, an act which showed her devotion to her favorite, Wolf, and explained his quick victory over his terrible antagonist.

The tragic incidents that followed swiftly had their effects on Tiger Dick, firing his blood already infused with fever; and when Barbara turned from barricading their retreat she found

him in the act of springing from the bed, his eyes glittering with incipient delirium.

"No! no!" she cried, gently forcing him back. "You cannot aid me. You will only injure yourself. Dick! Dick! try to be yourself. It is your illness that unduly excites you. Fight it down—for my sake, dear. I want all your wonderful coolness, now. Don't think of me. Do you suppose I have exposed myself here without the means of defense? I can beat them off until help comes. Lie down, my darling. Do you think I would let harm reach you?—you! No! no! All the powers of earth cannot beat down the barrier of my love! Its surrounds you like a wall of fire—a fortress of rock!"

Her ringing confident tones, her firm yet gentle touch, calmed him. With an effort of his iron will he conquered the weakness of the body, and cleared his brain of the gathering simoom of delirium. Yielding at once, himself again, he said:—

"Put my revolver within reach. If opportunity offer, I think I can still give these gentlemen a fair showing with the arm they have left me. You need have no fears on my account."

"My own brave Dick!" cried the girl, kissing him with a gush of admiring tenderness. "My hero!—my king!"

She placed the weapon as he requested; then sprang to repel their assailants.

Col. Oglethorpe had discovered the terrible missiles dropped upon his men as if out of the very heavens; and his warning cry enabled most of them to get out of its way, some by crushing their horses against the sides of the defile, some by abandoning their animals and springing up the precipitous rocks as best they could.

The devastation left in the track of that mighty boulder beggars description. The floundering of half-crushed animals that vainly essayed to regain their feet; the feeble struggles of men, but a moment since strong and full of life, now mangled and bloody and beaten back to earth by the iron hoofs of horses plunging uncontrolled in mad panic; groans, yells, curses, and the rattle of firearms from the loopholes of the besieged cabin; then the mad, helter-skelter retreat down that gorge of death!

It was a sorry group that finally rallied out of range of Barbara Musgrave's deadly revolvers. The men were humiliated. They felt that the rout was mainly due to their horses becoming unmanageable.

"Cleaned out by a woman an' a dog an' a dornick!" cried one. "Waal, I'll be blowed ef I don't swap my heart fur a yistid'y's chaw o' terbacker!"

"Don't you go in heavy on it's bein' only a woman," said another. "Ef thar ain't ten men in that thar shebang a-backin' of her, thar ain't none."

"The cold lead that was knockin' round loose up thar was unhealthy, fur a fact!"

"You bet!"

"How many men have we left in that infernal trap?" asked Col. Oglethorpe, with an ugly light in his eye, trying to get his party in form for review. "My God!" when he had counted them, "thar's five of our crowd, not counting Lanky Luke and this new man, Bashford. And, good Heavens! whar's Goddard?—the minister! Boys thar's no time for sogerin'. We must go back up thar, and tear out that nest!"

"It'll be dark in twenty minutes, Cap," suggested Lightning Joe, who always tempered valor with prudence.

"An' we'll never start that puncheon door without a batterin'-ram," interposed another.

In the midst of rapid orders for the transforming of a fallen tree-trunk into a ram, Col. Oglethorpe abruptly broke off with:—

"My God! what's this?"

All turned, to discover a man staggering down the gully with another on his shoulders.

Courage never fails of its meed of homage in the West; and right ringing was the cheer sent up, as the men hurriedly gathered about the hero.

"Ye hyear me? the gospel-sharp ain't no slouch!"

"Gents, fur unadulterated sand, he scoops the crowd!"

"Good boy! good boy! The man that's got the gall to pack his pard out o' that hole wouldn't back down to the devil himself!"

"I nominate the Gentleman from Massachusetts as the next mayor of Freeze-out Camp!"

"Hooray! hooray! That'll pass the house by a unanimous vote!"

Eager hands relieved the minister of his burden—the limp body of George Bashford.

Col. Oglethorpe grasped his friend's hand, and said, with deep feeling:—

"Goddard, this is too good! When I thought you was up thar, bored by a bullet or left in bad shape by that boulder—waal, old man, it wasn't a comfortable feeling, and that's a fact. Your face, all bloody as it is, looks handsome to me—it does, by—! Excuse my French; but thar are times when a man has got to put it strong, or bust!"

In silence the minister returned the warm

clasp of his rough yet stanch friend. It was plain that he did not court the praise of the crowd. True bravery is always modest.

He did not tell them why in the midst of death he had still thought of George Bashford, and risked his life to bring his body, dead or alive, off the field. He shrunk from acknowledging, even to himself, that he had sought thus to requite the debt Fawn-eye Fan owed her rescuer.

Ah! the heart! the heart!

But before Giles Goddard stood a rude borderman, with his hat doffed and his grizzled locks lifted by the passing winds.

"Parson," he said, "I want a grip o' your paw. I've always allowed that psalm-singin' an' sich took the heart out of a man, an' left him a mighty pore shoat—good enough, perhaps, to run the petticoat brigade, but with no manner o' use fur breeches an' stogie boots. But, stranger, when I find I'm up the wrong tree, I always come down; an' I want to say, right hyar an' now, that, parson ur no parson, ef you hain't got the right stuff in ye, I don't know pay-dirt when I see it—an' I've tramped up an' down this hyar lctle y'arth nigh onto three-score years on' ten, an' tried to keep my eyes skinned."

That honest tribute was a jewel—a diamond in the rough—worth any man's winning.

But it was not a time for words. In the gathering gloom, manning their battering ram, they charged up that way of death.

The moment she had repelled the first assault, Barbara Musgrave sprang into an inner apartment of her cabin, to reappear in a few minutes in the garb of the Dumb Bandit.

A rich color mantled her cheek, and the shy light of maidenly confusion was in her eyes, as she approached her lover.

The Tiger's eyes brightened with admiration.

"By Jove! if I were a woman, I would set my cap for you on the spot!" he declared.

"What a romantic-looking brigand you make, to be sure."

"It is for the last time, Dick," she said. "You are not annoyed? You don't think me—"

"I think you more and more charming in every new guise."

But the sound of the return of their foes chased the love-light from her eyes and the coy bloom from her cheeks. She thought of that vain struggle over the body of her dying father. But Dick—Dick was to her all that her father had been and more. Like a tigress, with blazing eyes and panting breath, she sprang to meet his foes.

Sharp and spiteful rung the crack of her pistols; but the charging column, now on foot with no frightened horses to throw them into confusion, kept on, until the house quivered with the shock of their heavy ram. Again and again came the heavy concussion like the boom of cannon amid the rattle of small-arms, the shouts, curses and groans of men, and the baying of the mastiff wolf.

"Rally! rally! One more charge! Forward!—double-quick!" shouted Col. Oglethorpe.

"Hurrah! Now give 'em —!" yelled one of the men.

Crash!

And with a riving of timbers the door hung in ruins.

"Once more, and in we go!"

"No quarter! Death to the infernal hounds—every mother's son of 'em!"

Yell rose upon yell. The men were furies.

But within was a heart whose raging lava their fiercest passion could not match.

"Come on, you devils!" grated Jack Musgrave's daughter, between her teeth, her arm nerved to strike double vengeance.

"Charge!" shouted Col. Oglethorpe, himself at the head of his men.

Another crash, and the door fell inward, the ram was dropped upon the threshold, and the assailants rushed pell-mell into the darkened room.

It was lighted by the flash of revolvers. Barbara Musgrave stood at bay before the bed of the man she loved. Tiger Dick, his old cool self, fired from where he lay.

Not the least terrible of the defenders was the mastiff.

"Seize them, Wolf! Tear them limb from limb!" cried Barbara, fairly beside herself with rage.

And in response to his mistress's voice, the faithful animal sprang upon Col. Oglethorpe, the first man to plant his foot across the threshold, and bore him to the floor.

But his followers rushed in, stumbling over the struggling man and brute.

"No quarter! no quarter!" was their cry.

To which the desperate woman replied:

"Quarter, you accursed hounds! We ask and give but death!"

And hurling her empty revolvers into their faces, she now, as before on that terrible night, sprang upon her heart's foes like a fury let loose, with a bowie-knife in either hand, cutting right and left while up from her hot heart seethed the desperate cry:

"Oh! will help never come? Will the pitiless God ever turn his face from me? Help from

Heaven or hell! I summon any ally! Back, you hell-hounds! Die! Die! DIE! DIE!"

Her frenzied cry rose to an eldritch shriek. In that supreme moment, when it seemed as if the agony of that other vain struggle must be passed through again, it is fair to say that the woman was temporarily insane.

For a moment she daunted them all—ay, drove them back to the doorway like huddling sheep.

In that moment there rose a cry without—a cry that struck dismay to the hearts of the assailants—a cry that caused the woman to laugh a wild, hysterical shriek of exultation.

"Rescue! Rescue! Rescue! Free Rangers of the Sierras!"

And from the rocks on every hand dropped dark forms into the ravine.

Then Pandemonium reigned supreme!

But, as her foes turned to retreat from the room and cut their way through the ranks of the new and overpowering force, she who had fought them like a fiend incarnate was instantly transformed by the magic of love, once more into a woman, with but one thought—a woman's thought!

At a bound she gained the bedside, where Tiger Dick sat upright, and flung her arms about him, with the passionate heart-cry:

"Dick! Dick! you are not hurt? Tell me you are not hurt!"

"I have something better than myself to talk about, my brave girl," replied the Tiger, in firm, clear tones, that were balm to her longing love. "You—are you hurt?"

"If I were hacked to pieces I should not know it, at this moment!" cried the girl. "Oh, Dick! Thank God! thank God!"

And, overcome with emotion, she buried her face in his breast.

Ah, how she loved him!

And he? Well, she pleased him—very much as a spirited horse would have pleased him!

This man, whose soul was dead to every ennobling sentiment, accepted the priceless treasure of her devotion with as little thought as when, in his flight from Colonel Ogleshorpe and his men, he had ridden his horse to the last gasp.

Love-blind, the woman gave her golden grain without stint, and never dreamed of weighing the chaff she was receiving in return. A touch, a word from him was enough.

But, in the midst of her happiness, a step close at hand—a stealthy, catlike tread—drew her attention. The sounds of battle had gone down the gulch into the main canyon, the road-agents having thrown the men of Freeze-out Camp into panic by their surprise.

Framed in the doorway appeared the figure of a man, bending forward and peering into the darkened room. His black eyes glittered, his white teeth gleamed, as his darkly-mustached lip drew back from them, and he breathed softly:

"Maldita!"

As she turned and saw him, brave Jack Musgrave's daughter felt a pang of icy fear dart through her heart.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE SPANISH LOVER.

FOREMOST in that headlong rush to the succor of their chief was Anselmo del Mornez; and, in the fight that followed, as if the revolver would not sate the fiendish rage that possessed him, he struck right and left with his stiletto, springing upon his victims with the snarling ferocity of a wild beast.

But the incentive which inspired with such reckless courage the man who had been cowed by Shadow Jim's eye was explained when, the moment the Vigilantes were beaten off, the Spaniard, leaving his fellows to pursue the retreating enemy, turned back to the cabin, with solicitude for the fate of his chief plainly written in his face.

And this was what met his anxious gaze: on the threshold the mastiff, standing on guard across the body of a man who lay stark and still in death; within, another writhing feebly in the anguish of a mortal wound; beside him the dead bound; at the further side of the room the Dumb Bandit kneeling at the bedside, with his (or her, since we now know her to be a woman) head in the breast of a stranger, evidently wounded or an invalid, the attitude susceptible of but one interpretation—love!

At this spectacle a simoom of fury rage swept over the soul of the Spaniard; a temporary blindness, which in the daytime would have appeared as a mist of blood, obscured his vision; and, clutching his reeking stiletto, he was about to swoop upon the object of his jealous fury, when a savage growl from the mastiff admonished him to desist.

He restrained himself; but in his heart sat the demon of murder, to which he whispered:

"Look but a little now! There are times and seasons. A day—is it not like other days? But, jealous rage sweeping everything before it, death of my soul!—an hour! a minute! a second of time—Ah! Car-r-r-rajo!"

We have seen the chill that struck at Barbara Musgrave's heart at sight of this man. Ah! the enemies to her happiness seemed to spring up

on every hand; and she, so brave to meet any physical danger, quailed a very woman, when assailed in the citadel of her affections.

"Our enemies—are they beaten off?" she asked, to cover her disconcertion.

"Si, senor capitan," replied the Spaniard, the words nearly choking him.

The woman (the reader will remember that she was in the dress of a Spanish caballero, in her character of the Dumb Bandit; yet she spoke to Anselmo del Mornez, showing that he, as well as Boss Kane, must be in her confidence), left the cabin, quitting the side of the man she loved with all her soul to go out to this one whom she now hated with every fiber of her being. Yet nothing of this appeared in her manner, when, out of earshot from the cabin, she turned to him and said:

"Anselmo, I have a commission for you. I can trust it to no hand other than one which is thoroughly devoted to me."

"There is no question of my devotion," replied the man, struggling to hold his passion in check. "But what is this I see? Ah! a thousand million devils of hell!"

And his rage burst all restraint.

"What do you mean?" cried the woman, at once flying to arms.

None so swift to resentment as they who know their own guilt!

"Look you!" cried the Spaniard, seizing her wrist, and fetching his face close to hers, as he glared into her eyes through the darkness. "I have stood between the senor, thy father, and his enemies, shielding his life with my body. For what? Because I loved thee! When he had fallen, I, Anselmo del Mornez, I struck swift, deep, unceasingly, sparing none that had conspired against his life. For what? Because I loved thee! Now, I stand between thee, my little one, and thy foes. To court death for its own sake? Carajo! do men love that which ends all in rottenness! What places me at thy beck and call making me the slave of thy veriest whim? Why do I bend my neck that thou mayst mount from it to thy saddle, and kiss the foot that thrills me with its dear pressure?"

"And thou hast smiled upon me. Ah! Madre de Dios! but now didst thou call me 'Anselmo!'"

"But he! he! Who is it there?"

And he pointed a vibrant finger in the direction of the cabin they had just left.

"Thy arms about him—thy head upon his breast—Fiends of darkness!"

The woman flung his hand from her wrist, seeming to choke with haughty passion.

"Go!" she said. "We have had enough of this folly!"

"Stay!" he cried, springing after her and detaining her, as she turned away. Do you defy me, having betrayed my love? Look you!—we Spaniards love revenge!"

"Bah! you Spaniards love slaves!" she retorted, turning upon him, with fiery disdain. "Do you fancy that you can mold me into a cringing dependent on your smile or frown? You woo me with accusations and threats of revenge! Do your worst! I defy you!"

Her lofty stand daunted her ill-regulated lover.

"Barbara, light of my life, a word of explanation. It is all I ask," he said, humbly.

"Explanations!" she retorted. "They are thrown away on such as you. How long is it since you were as absurdly jealous of Boss Kane? A fair prospect for the future! Do you think I would submit to be harassed all my life by such petty tyranny?"

"Reflect—it is my love that makes me grudge every glance given to another."

"Besides," pursued the woman, ignoring his humble plea. "What claim have you upon me? None whatever!"

"Barbara, you mentioned a commission," urged the lover, brokenly.

"I shall intrust it to another."

"None can serve thee so faithfully as I. Look you! I was hasty."

His apology seemed to soften the woman. After a moment's hesitancy, she said:

"It is this. I have changed my mind with reference to the prisoner. I now wish to get rid of her. But it must appear that she has effected her escape without my connivance. How can you manage it?"

"You mean to let her go free entirely?"

"Yes."

"To restore her to her friends?"

"Bah! I care nothing what becomes of her, so long as I am well rid of her. Leave her to starve in the mountains, or thrust her over some convenient cliff; anything, provided she is put beyond the chance of returning to our camp."

The Spaniard's eyes contracted in shrewd speculation. Why this strange change of purpose? Plainly from no abatement of hatred.

"It is of the things possible to be managed," he said, slowly, "could she be made to believe that I am from her friends, to help her to escape."

"Ah!" cried Barbara, quickly, "you can be on guard, and let her pass."

"Not so!" objected the Spaniard, with emphasis. "Put the stupid Sleepy Jake on

guard. He will never betray who passes him in the dark!"

The Spaniard's manner gave his words a covert meaning.

"What!" cried the woman, seizing his wrist, "you would not—you would not?"

"Tush!" with a careless shrug—"a hog! What is he to you—to himself—to any one?"

The woman's eyes glittered in the darkness. "You bloodthirsty hound!" she reflected.

"You teach me a lesson which exactly meets my necessities. You will have no right to complain if made to drink of your own brewing."

Aloud she said, after a pause, as if struggling with herself:

"But if you are detected?—a mere suspicion—"

"Caramba! Am I a burglar?"

And drawing his stiletto, he pursued:

"This, my silent assistant, makes no outcry."

"Go!" said the woman, as if shrinking from so wanton a sacrifice of life, such base treachery to one of her own following, yet her manner intimating that she would, in the end, yield to his plan.

"A word," interposed the Spaniard. "After this is done? Thou, light of my life, knowest my love for thee. When is the darkness of waiting to be dispelled?"

The woman tossed her head impatiently.

"When this is done we will talk of the other. Go!—they are returning. I must not be found talking with you."

He went.

"When this is done!" he muttered to himself. "Ah, caramba! I shall but practice on Sleepy Jake. The master stroke I reserve for this—this—Mil diablos!"

Barbara Musgrave, too, alone, repeated:

"When this is done! Ah, when it is done—then come to me!"

She laughed in a manner not pleasant to see.

"You slay for nothing—as a mere convenience. Then do not blame me if I defend my love by desperate measures."

With her hands clasped over her throbbing heart, the woman looked up into the night-curtained sky and cried, with all the passion of her soul:

"Ah, Dick! for you I would blot out the stars, the very sun, were it in my power!"

Returning from the rout of the Vigilantes, the road-agents stood respectfully aloof, while only their lieutenant entered the cabin, whither Barbara had preceded him.

"Make provision for the immediate removal of this gentleman to the Retreat!" she said. "It will no longer be safe here."

Hiding the savage gleam in his eyes by dropping his eyelids, Boss Kane bowed acquiescence. Stepping to the door, he called:

"Jim, detail four men, and march this way."

Upon entering the cabin with his men, Shadow Jim at a glance recognized his old master. But craft was the very core of his nature; concealment with him was instinctive.

He had never met any one with whom he so perfectly affiliated as with the Tiger; and his instant impulse was to leave the way open for a renewal of their old alliance against all the world when it might stand them in hand to hide the fact of their previous acquaintance.

At sight of his old confederate in crime, the Tiger started to his elbow with a breaking look of recognition; but, always on his guard against surprises, so that he had acquired perfect control over those muscles which by involuntary action betray in expression or gesture internal states of feeling, the subtle Jim returned the glance of curious interest of a total stranger.

The Tiger sunk back with a sigh, as of pain. A perfect understanding had been established between them.

And Barbara Musgrave stood by and saw nothing of this speck on the horizon, which was destined to overcast the whole sky of her happiness with clouds of black despair.

CHAPTER XX.

PLOT UPON PLOT.

THE wounded man having been borne on a stretcher to the Ranger's Retreat, and lodged in the cabin of the chief, which, hitherto, no one but Boss Kane had been privileged to enter, the rage of Anselmo del Mornez was something terrible to witness.

Shadow Jim, whom nothing escaped, caught the Spaniard talking to his stiletto in a manner calculated to curdle the blood.

"What, little one! he would rob us—eh? It is cowards, then, that submit to pillage—eh? Shall we rest easy, thou and I, oh Serpent's Tongue? Art athirst, thou whose wine is blood?—warm blood! Car-r-r-ramba!"

"So!" mused Shadow Jim, coolly. "That devil is brooding mischief. It seems he hasn't got over the effects of our little game. I suppose, now, he wants to get even with me in his accursed Spanish fashion. Well, maybe I can show him a trick or two at that also!"

That misapprehension made Shadow Jim a ready tool to the hand of the Dumb Bandit, when, on the next morning, he was summoned by a sign to follow his chief.

At a little distance from the cabins, where

there was no danger of their being overheard, the bandit chief stopped and said:—

"You have been of my following but two months; yet your evident ability has led me to place you next to my lieutenant, over the heads of men older both in years and in faithful service."

"A partiality which I have tried to prove not unworthily bestowed," replied Shadow Jim, warily.

"You have been satisfied with our association, thus far?"

"Perfectly."

"You understand that in an organization like this there must be one will paramount. On the other hand must be blind obedience."

"Certainly."

"To what extent, then, can I count on your carrying out my will without question or cavil?"

"As long as I am a member of your band I know but one law—the commands of my superiors."

"Even to the taking of the life of a comrade?"

Shadow Jim hesitated just an instant while his thoughts reverted to Tiger Dick. Then he said:—

"There is perhaps one possible reserve to such a proposition."

"And that is?"

"In case the intended victim were my especial friend—my pardner. I believe that tie to be closer than any other."

"Then you would not kill your partner at the command of your chief?"

"That depends. If he had betrayed, or was about to betray, the band, I would shoot him like a dog."

"Ah! And in what case would you hesitate?"

"If I thought it was a mere case of personal spite, and that my pardner, without fault, was to be the victim of tyranny."

"But your oath of allegiance and obedience?"

"As I have said, as long as I preserved my connection with the band, I would obey orders unquestioningly. But if called upon for such service as this, I would resign on the spot."

"But if your chief refused to accept your resignation, and insisted upon your obedience?"

Shadow Jim smiled with his wonted cool self-confidence.

"In that case," he said, "we should probably test the true basis of all governmental authority, and the better man would carry his point."

"You are frank, at least," observed the robber-chief.

"Of course," replied Shadow Jim, "you understand that we have instanced an extreme case. I anticipate no such issue with a leader so reasonable as I have ever found my present chief."

"Do you look upon any member of the band as a partner?" asked the Dumb Bandit, ignoring the compliment.

"No."

"And you would execute my orders even to the taking of life, and without question?"

"Such is my understanding of the obligation I assumed on becoming a member of your band."

Barbara Musgrave trembled. She could feel remorseless in exacting vengeance of her father's murderers, but this plotting the death of a man whose only offense was his love for her was quite another thing. All the fierce, wild life she had led for the past year and more had not crushed out her better nature.

But if she did not remove this man, in his jealous fury he would kill her, or, worse, Dick. That nerved her to go on.

"It is my wish to remove our prisoner from the Retreat, giving to her removal the appearance of an escape—"

"Stop!" cried Shadow Jim, with sudden animation, altogether unusual in this nonchalant villain. "I did not bargain to 'remove' women!"

"Are you in love with this one?" asked Barbara, scanning him sharply, her quick jealousy taking fire.

"N—no!" said Jim, relapsing into his wonted insouciance. "But I fancy it wouldn't be pleasant to dream of her eyes after one had doused her glim."

"You misunderstood me. You are not asked to harm her. But a certain member of this band will assist her to escape, and get her by the guard. He must not live to betray that this is with my connivance. It is with him that you are to deal."

"Command me," was the simple rejoinder; and Shadow Jim blew a thin spiral of blue smoke from his lips and watched its ascent with an indifference which showed how lightly he valued the lives of his companions in crime.

"The man is Anselmo del Mornez," said Barbara, watching her companion narrowly to see what effect the announcement might have.

The name thrilled through Shadow Jim, but his perfectly-drilled face betrayed nothing.

"As well him as a better," he said, carelessly.

Having developed her plot, Barbara dismissed her ready tool.

Shortly after Shadow Jim was in the saddle, riding away from the Retreat.

"A jealous woman beats the devil," said he, in confidence, to a flask which he drew from his pocket. "So she don't care what becomes of the pretty Farnsworth if only she is well rid of her society. A sudden change of front, this. But what becomes of her fine scheme of revenge? She gives that the go-by rather than risk her little game with Dick. Lucky dog, Dick! Ha! ha! She, too, is afraid of those eyes."

"But what in Cain shall I do with a petticoat on my hands? Here's for inspiration!"

And putting the flask to his lips, he closed his eyes and let the liquor run down his throat. Even Dilapidated Dan could not extract more perfect bliss from a "nip" than did Shadow Jim.

"Ah!" he sighed, at the end of his long draught, "the happy thought comes. The oracle saith 'Dick.' By the tricky god! but this promises sport. What a debt of gratitude Dick will owe me. He's a mighty good judge of horse-flesh and the points of a fine woman, is Dick. Ha! ha! While his jealous queen puts temptation away from him—and thereby shows her correct estimate of Dick, by Jove—I hold the delicate morsel in trust for him, to the neglect of my own claims. There's generosity for you!"

And plotting the wreck of Barbara Musgrave's happiness as carelessly as he had become a party to the death of the Spaniard, Shadow Jim rode on, laughing.

Little dreaming how her schemes were to frustrate their end, as most wickedness does, Barbara Musgrave went to gloat over her enemy for the last time.

Disappointed in her hopes of release, Nellie Farnsworth had spent a night of sleepless expectancy, alternating with despair, followed by a day of feverish anxiety. The return of the road-agents and the resumption of their carousal, now wrangling like beasts, now roaring in boisterous mirth, proved that her friends, if they had been the cause of the sudden excitement of the day before, had been defeated. What hope, then, was left?

Toward the middle of the afternoon the door of her prison was rudely thrust open, and the Dumb Bandit stalked in.

The girl shrank cowering in a corner.

CHAPTER XXI.

A TAP ON THE WINDOW.

THREE days of suspense had worn upon Nellie Farnsworth, leaving her wan and woe-begone. She had wept until tears would no longer flow, and her eyes were hollowed and leaden-ringed. Yet, thus impaired, her fragile beauty, as she cowered in abject, voiceless terror, filled Barbara Musgrave with jealous wrath.

"It is such namby-pamby creatures as she that men love!" reflected the Amazonian beauty. "I must send her away lest she outrival me! Ah! I could scar her baby face until she would shudder to look at its reflection! That would be a revenge—to disfigure her, and let her live!"

And helpless Nellie shivered at the glare of savage gloating which came into her enemy's eyes at this diabolical thought.

But the painful ordeal was over at last. Barbara Musgrave could not long endure the torture her jealousy inflicted on herself.

Fearing that she would burst into speech and so betray her sex, if she remained, she left her cowering victim, to wrestle with the throes of passion where no eye could witness.

The day wore on, until night brought the bacchanal revels of the bandits in the outer room. At a late hour they dispersed, and Nellie listened to the heavy, regular snoring of Aunt Chloe within and the crash and roar of the thunder, the dismal sighing of the wind, and the swash of the rain, without.

All dressed—she had not dared to remove her clothes during her imprisonment—the wretched girl cast herself upon the bed, to sleep in fitful dozes, from which she started ever and anon, quivering and with an icy sweat oozing from every pore, the horrors of the reality scarcely a relief from her horror-haunted dreams.

Thus from a doze of sheer exhaustion she started erect. What was it? Hark!

Tap! tap! tap!

She almost screamed, as she leaped from the bed and stood quivering in the middle of the room.

Some one was trying to get in at the window, she thought.

A blinding flash of lightning flooded the room with sepulchral light, for a moment, through the curtained window. Then the heavens seemed to be riven asunder and the earth shaken to its center. As the roar sunk into a distant muttering rumble among the far crags, the heavy, bestial snore of the negress reminded Nellie that she was not utterly alone, when again came that low:—

Tap! tap! tap!

The girl was about to spring to her prison door to shake it, crying out to rouse the woman

in the outer room, when another sound arrested her attention. It was a warning:—

"Sh-h-h!"

What did it mean? She caught her breath. A sudden wild hope thrilled her and set her to quaking in every limb, so that she could scarcely stand.

Was it friends at last?

She crept to the window, scarcely daring to lift the curtain, so swiftly changeable was the play of tremulous hope and shrinking fear.

Displacing but a corner of the curtain, she peered into the black outer darkness, to dimly discern a shadowy figure.

"Sh! Make no noise!" warned a voice through the crevices of the loose casement.

"Who are you?" asked the girl in a tremulous whisper, her heart throbbing so tumultuously that it almost suffocated her.

"A friend," came the reply, "ready to help you to escape. Can you draw aside the window without noise?"

"It is nailed shut," replied Nellie, despairingly.

"Wait, I will come to you through the other room."

"No! no!" breathed the girl in a panic. "A woman is sleeping there on guard. You will be discovered."

"Hush! I will be with you in a moment."

She heard stealthy steps in retreat. Then she waited, breathlessly, her hand pressed hard over her bounding heart.

Aunt Chloe strangled in her sleep. Would she wake? No. Her deep, regular snoring was resumed.

But hark! She choked. She moved. Then all was still. Good heavens! had Nellie's rescuer killed that old creature to guard against detection?

The girl felt her hair rising with horror. In a moment that red-handed murderer would come to lead her forth!

She could not touch his hand. If it was George Bashford— But the thought ended in a pang of sickening pain.

Her blood turned to ice as the door softly opened, and then closed as gently. She was alone in the utter darkness of the room, with her rescuer and Aunt Chloe's murderer, whoever he might be. She felt the presence she could not see. Her straining ear distinguished his breathing.

"Who are you?" she asked, with difficulty preventing her teeth from chattering.

"One who is risking his life to save you from your enemies," came the guarded reply. "Move this way. Give me your hand. I will lead you forth in safety."

Her hand?—her hand?—to that murderer!

She shrank further into the corner.

"We shall awaken Aunt Chloe," she said, impelled by an impulse which she did not clearly analyze in that moment of horror.

"No; she sleeps soundly," replied the unknown.

Ah! was there a terrible significance in those simple words?

"You have murdered her!" whispered the shuddering girl.

"Murdered her?" replied the man. "Caramba! no. Why should I murder her?"

Nellie's only reply was a quivering cry of terror.

She knew with whom she was alone in that darkened room.

CHAPTER XXII.

OUT INTO THE DARK.

OF all men Nellie Farnsworth feared the Spaniard with the lurking devils in his burning glances, scarcely second to the Dumb Bandit himself. It seemed in perfect keeping that he should clear his way by murder.

The man saw that he had betrayed himself prematurely by that unguarded ejaculation.

At that moment fortune gave him a chance to retrieve his position somewhat.

Aunt Chloe began to snore a deep, sonorous bass which could not be mistaken.

"Listen!" said Anselmo del Mornez. "You hear? Why should I kill her? Be convinced. I am your friend. I will restore you to your friends."

Plainly she had wronged him in that grave charge. But why should he, a stranger, befriend her?—why betray his fellows?

She recalled his looks—those burning glances that had so terrified her. Might he not be taking her from the Dumb Bandit to appropriate her himself? Where into the mountain solitudes might he lead her, to be alone with him, away from even such small protection as Aunt Chloe's vicinity afforded, helpless at his mercy?

Must she fall thus from horror into horror? Oh! what would become of her?

She was about to shriek aloud for help, preferring present known dangers to unvalued possibilities, when he spoke again.

"Listen! Do not decide hastily. I know that you fear me—doubt my sincerity. You ask yourself why I should betray my captain for your sake. Look you! You have a friend, George Bashford?"

"Oh, where is he?" breathed the girl, clasping her hands with eager hope, and straining her

eyes as if she would pierce the impenetrable darkness.

"He is just without the guard, in the gorge leading up to this glen. He would have ventured to penetrate even here, to reassure you in person, but that I persuaded him that discovery would be inevitable. I can be seen moving about without exciting suspicion; but a stranger would stumble upon death at every step in this den."

"But how do I know that you are telling the truth?" persisted the girl, wavering between hope and fear.

"Look you!" replied the Spaniard. "It is that I betray my friends—eh?"

"Yes."

"Senora, I hide not the truth. Money is powerful. Here, you are worth not a peso to me. Yonder, in the transfer to your lover, you are worth a thousand dollars. *Carrai!* what will you?"

A thousand dollars! Her lover! The girl felt her heart bound.

In the coach she had felt only an awakening interest in the young man, who was in reality a stranger to her. She had admired his fine physique, his frank geniality, that unconscious dignity without pretension which marks the gentleman.

When danger threatened she had instinctively appealed to him. And how promptly, with what high courage and ready address, he had responded!

During her imprisonment he had never been out of her thoughts. She looked to him for succor. Although it was a little startling just at first, it did not shock her to hear him spoken of as her lover.

For one instant she shrunk within herself, blushing scarlet even there in the darkness. Then an irresistible longing to go to him, to be safe within his protection, swept over her in a wave of feeling; and groping her way forward in the darkness, she cried:

"Take me to him—at once! I will go with you!"

Ah! how cruelly she was deceived!

"Senora, it is well. You have decided wisely. Be guided by my voice. Here; give me your hand."

She did not shrink from it then; but, finding it in the darkness, she clasped it eagerly.

The hand was soft and delicate, as having never been chafed by hard work, and warm with the high tide of tropical blood. Its gentle yet firm grasp reassured the trembling girl. He might be better than he looked.

On tiptoe they made their way through the dining-hall, Nellie fairly holding her breath, lest Aunt Chloe should be awakened. Out into the stormy night, where the girl's first step was into a pool of mud ankle-deep. Then, with her garments blown about her by the gusty winds and the raindrops shaken down upon her from the swaying treetops, she was hurried along, following in the footsteps of her guide where, unaided, she could not have picked her way a dozen paces.

Now the glaring lightning terrified her, now the inky blackness that succeeded. Soon she was drenched to the skin, shivering with cold and fear, and ready to sink with weakness, as utterly miserable as her worst enemy could wish her.

In this plight, her guide abruptly stopped, so that she fell against him; and by a flash of lightning she discovered a man moving in their vicinity. It was the Dumb Bandit!

Goaded by a tumult of conflicting hopes and fears, the undisciplined nature of Barbara Musgrave could not endure inactivity and suspense, but drove her out into the storm, to cool her fevered temples in the swirling rain-drops, to find sympathy in the waving elements, and to be at hand to see that her scheme was successfully executed.

Could sorely-trying Nellie Farnsworth have known that her enemy was as anxious to get rid of her as she was to get away, she would have been spared the agony of despair that swept over her, so that she clung in panic to the Spaniard, whom but now she had feared to touch.

"Oh! let us go back!" she whispered, dreading that this attempt at escape would precipitate the vague terrors that hung over her.

"Hush!" breathed her guide in her ear.

Then for perhaps ten minutes—to the excited girl it seemed an age—they stood perfectly still, cowering in the rain-dripping bush.

Again they crept forward, until, nearing the sentinel, the Spaniard left his charge, directing her to keep perfectly still, no matter what happened, unless a shot was fired which would arouse the camp. In that event she was to rush forward and make her escape down the gorge at any hazard.

"There must be no weakness or hesitancy," he whispered. "Remember that, once among your friends below, you are safe; but to be recaptured will bring horrors that your wildest fancy cannot picture. Be brave but now a little. Think of your lover who has risked his life for you, and demands of you courage."

"I will! I will!" she whispered. "But, oh! do not be long!"

Then her clinging fingers released his hand, and he glided away with the noiselessness of a serpent.

Alone, what terrors assailed the delicate girl! The gleaming, hissing lightning, the bellowing thunder, the rushing winds, the swirling rain, all around the trees writhing-like contending demons! Behind her the robbers' den filled with those dreadful men who were more like devils than human beings; near her—hidden by the darkness, how near?—her implacable foe, her father's enemy; before her—Oh, horror!—to escape she might have to rush over the body of a murdered man! Shivering, shuddering, she covered her face with her hands and waited, straining her ears to catch the first sound of that impending tragedy.

It came!

A crash among the bushes!

A voice crying:—

"Ah, devils!"

A shot!

A shriek of mortal anguish!

A voice calling:—

"Nellie! Nellie! Miss Farnsworth!"

Dizzy with horror, yet thrilled through and through with a wild hope, the girl sprang up and rushed headlong down the gorge—to what?

CHAPTER XXIII.

BLACK TREACHERY!

ANSELMO DEL MORNEZ had crept forward until by the gleam of the lightning he discovered the sentinel, cloaked to the chin and with his back to the storm.

The eyes of the Spaniard glittered with murderous malice.

"Ah! the accursed *gringo!*" he muttered. "Hog of an American! *Caramba!* could I with one blow exterminate the race! But thou!—I will square the account with the hateful one!"

And, with his stiletto held between his teeth, he crept forward, crouching like a beast of prey.

But, "it's a poor rule that don't work both ways." While arranging this scheme so as to afford himself an opportunity to quit his private feud against Sleepy Jake, the Spaniard should have reflected that, reciprocating his hate with equal cordiality, Sleepy Jake would be just the one to lend himself to a plot of counter treachery.

And so it was. For once in his life, at least, Sleepy Jake belied his *sobriquet*, by being thoroughly wide-awake, at the very moment when his enemy thought him most off his guard.

In the very act of making his deadly spring, the treacherous Spaniard was grasped by an unseen hand, tripped, and hurled to the ground; and a flash of lightning showed him Shadow Jim and Sleepy Jake standing over him.

"Ah, devils!" he cried, the whole scheme of treachery flashing through his mind.

But ere he could spring up and battle for his life, Shadow Jim planted his foot firmly on his neck, pinning him to the ground, while he said coolly to his companion:—

"The infernal Greaser was about to snuff your candle for you. You're the man to fix him."

"You're right, pardner," replied Sleepy Jake.

Then to his prostrate foe:—

"You cussed whelp, I've been layin' fur you this long while! Here's at you!"

And, as deliberately as if shooting a dog, he fired at the Spaniard's heart.

With a shriek of mortal agony, the traitor, caught in his own trap, writhed from under Shadow Jim's foot, and then lay still.

The next instant, with a lightning movement, Shadow Jim knocked his colleague senseless with the butt of his revolver, and shouted:—

"Nellie! Nellie! Miss Farnsworth!"

All unsuspecting, this was the rescuer into whose arms the poor girl rushed.

"This way! Follow me closely and quickly!" he said, grasping her hand and hurrying her over the uneven ground down the gorge.

Behind them they left a Pandemonium!

Barbara Musgrave, as we have said, was driven out into the tempest by the battling forces of love and hate that filled her soul with the din of conflict.

Anselmo del Mornez's claim upon her was not without some justice. Inspired by his love for her, he had ever, in her presence, acted the part of a hero. She admired his fine, manly physique, his chivalrous dash, his strong, passionate nature; and there had been times when, goaded by heart-hunger, she had let him see that she was half-ready to yield herself up to his ardent suit.

But he was far from her ideal, noticeable only by contrast with the rude men with whom he was surrounded. She knew that he could never command the full, free outpouring with which she had dreamed of unburdening her heart.

But with Tiger Dick! Ah! she caught her breath; her pulses leaped; her soul gushed forth in an overwhelming torrent that left her faint and dizzy with excess of delight.

And this Spaniard had interposed his paltry claim! This fellow, whom the most worthless bummers in the mines despised as a "Greaser,"

might rob her of her heaven! He dared to rival Dick, her prince, her hero!—might even strike at his life while he lay helpless!

Out into the night she went, her heart on fire, her hand upon the butt of her revolver. If her agents failed, she would be at hand to crush this viper beneath her own heel. An abortive attempt at his life would tell him her treachery, and she knew that he would strike back with deadly venom.

In the darkness and tempest she stood, her attitude, her gleaming eyes, her dilated nostrils, her lips, drawn back from her teeth and quivering, betraying the fierce characteristics of a beast, and witnessed the tragedy in the glare of the lurid lightning; then the address with which Shadow Jim delayed pursuit by putting Sleepy Jake beyond the reach of immediate questions; and, lastly, the blind rush of Nellie Farnsworth into the trap set for her.

Then this woman, whom love or hate swept to a heaven of devotion or a hell of implacable malevolence, sprang forward, knelt beside the victim of her treachery, felt of the pulses at his wrist, of his heart, and even parted his eyelids with her fingers, and by the glare of the lightning gazed into those eyes that might never more quicken with life, to see if the passionate soul that had resided in their depths was fled forever!

Not with the love-light of old, but with the blue glaze of death, they stared back at her. To awaken remorse, pity? No! With a wild laugh of exultant triumph, she sprang up and fled, to escape detection by her band, who were already rushing from their cabins, half-dressed, but not forgetful of their revolvers and bowie-knives.

Boss Kane was in advance, dressed only in shirt, trousers and top-boots, his unkempt black hair and beard and the wolfish look of expectancy in his rolling eyes giving him the aspect of some wild Barbarian Vandal.

"Deploy!" he shouted. "Close upon the mouth of the gorge! Let nothing alive break through the line! We kin hold an army outside; but, once inside, our goose is cooked! Remember, they bring lariats!"

Thus reminded that they were fighting "with their necks in halter," the road-agents spread out like the periphery of a fan, and charged the imaginary foe, toward a common center, until they poured into and down the gorge, coming upon those two motionless bodies at the lower end.

"Eh! What's this?" demanded the robber lieutenant. "It's Anse. And as dead as a mackerel!"

"Jake's fixed, too," said one who had turned over and examined the sentinel. "But only a rap on the knowledge box, I reckon."

"But what was the Greaser doin' down hyar?"

"Boys, I allow he's jest laid fur Jake, an' got scooped in hisself. Them two has been at loggerheads ever sense they've b'longed to the land."

"Sarved the blasted skunk right!"

"—a Greaser, anyhow!"

At this moment a man elbowed his way through the crowd, and knelt beside the Spaniard. The moon, breaking through a rift in the hurrying clouds, illuminated the spot for a moment.

The new-comer lifted Anselmo del Mornez's head, turned the face, whose sallow complexion changed the blue pallor of death into a greenish white, toward the light, and gazed into it sadly, silently; then laid the head back gently, and rose to his feet without a word.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE HALF-BREED'S PLEDGE.

THERE was something in his voiceless regret that checked the imprecations and epithets of contempt on the lips of even those rude spectators.

"Hold on, boys," said Boss Kane. "He's the half-breed's pard; an' he's dead an' fast damnin', I reckon. Pete, you kin cart him off to your wikkiup, an' pow-wow him, ef ye like. We'll plant him in the mornin'."

"An' now, as this hyar 'pears to be a false alarm, an' thar ain't no enemy around, I allow the only thing left to do is to set another guard, an' p'int fur our warm bunks, out o' this hyar blasted rain."

"Hyar, Sam; you're a purty good lookin' feller to shiver in yer shirt-tail, tell we kin send down a man with a little better outfit o' duds."

"Boys, ef ye can't put Sleepy Jake on his pins, tote him along amongst ye."

So they returned, not suspecting as yet that their prisoner had fled.

The Dumb Bandit, before whom all made way respectfully, drew Boss Kane aside with a sign. After a moment's conference, the robber chief turned away, leaving the subordinate with a half puzzled, half suspicious look on his face, and preceded the rest up the gorge.

There was a wild light in Barbara Musgrave's eye, a wild surge of emotion in her heart. Her plot was successful. Nothing now stood between her and her heart's idol. She could have shouted aloud in her fierce exultation; forgetting the

cold hand that, relaxing in death, had released her; remembering only the warm, living embrace into which she longed to cast herself.

She could not go to Dick at once, but paced back and forth in the rain and wind, until her passion had somewhat cooled. Then she entered, and stood beside his couch.

"What was the row, Barbara?" he asked, in his cool, unconcerned way.

"Nothing," she replied. "One of the men attempted to settle a quarrel with another while the latter was on sentinel duty, thinking, no doubt, that he might escape suspicion by making it appear that his victim had been killed by some prowling enemy. But the would-be murderer got worsted."

"Rubbed out?"

"Yes."

"A plucky and vigilant sentinel, Barbara. He deserves promotion."

"Dick," said the girl, her voice trembling, "you shall promote him, if you like!"

Then, overcome by the thought of what her words implied, she sunk upon her knees at the bedside, clasped in a passionate embrace the man who dominated her heart so completely, and hid her hot face in his breast, murmuring:

"Dick!—oh, Dick!"

Tiger Dick placed his hand on the bowed head and smiled. Already he saw himself at the head of this band of stout fellows, with whom, he promised himself, he would make the country ring.

In another cabin, at a little distance, was enacted a far different scene.

It inclosed but a single room, and was of the simplest construction—poles and bark, the too free circulation of air being further checked by blankets hung against the walls after the manner of the old time arras. Across one side of the room extended a pine bunk, long enough for two beds, end to end.

On one of these beds lay a motionless, blood-stained figure. Beside it stood a slender, almost boyish form, with the peculiar, wild grace of the savage. The hair was black, coarse and straight, the face deeply bronzed, but the features more refined than those common to the Indian. There was proud, passionate, Castilian blood coursing in the half breed Pete's veins.

Flaring in the draughts that penetrated the room from without, the flame of a tallow candle, stuck in its own grease on the corner of a rude table, cast a wavering illumination over this scene. As it brightened, the sorrow with which the youth gazed upon his stricken "partner" was clearly revealed: as it darkened, a black, vengeful frown seemed to contract his brows.

Suddenly he started, gazed wildly at the recumbent figure, bent over it, placed his ears to its lips, started back again, stared at it more wildly, then burst into speech:—

"God of my fathers! he lives!"

It was true. The man's muscles began to contract. He was writhing, though perhaps as yet unconscious of pain.

The half-breed sprang to a tin pan containing water, and bathed the Spaniard's face. Then he poured liquor down his throat from a flask. A moment later he cried:—

"Ah, *camarado!* *gracias a Dios*, thou hast come back to me! Listen then, heart of my soul! Shalt live? Be it so! Saints and martyrs plead for thee! But if not, hear me swear, by Her of the Sacred Heart, thou shalt not go unavenged! Listen, my brother! Be thine enemy one—be they many—I will follow them night and day! I will be as cunning as the fox, as watchful as the hawk, as silent as the serpent! When I strike, the blow will come out of the heart of the night!"

Wild-eyed, gasping, Anselmo del Mornez attempted to rise to his elbow, but fell back exhausted. Then, while he struggled with death, he fixed his dim eyes upon his friend with an awful, wolfish, hungry longing.

"Drink! drink! in the name of the holy One!" cried the half-breed, holding the pan of water to his lips.

The dying man swallowed a mouthful, then set his teeth on the rim of the pan and spit it from him, in his savage eagerness to speak ere the faint spark of life went out.

"Hark you—Pedro!" he gasped, his tongue so heavy as to muffle his articulations almost beyond intelligibility. "Our chief—a woman—"

Then he struggled, his eyes dilating as with strangulation, a dull purple appearing in his face in spots.

Pedro breathed:

"A woman! Ah! *Santissime Virgen!*"

"Love—I loved—her!" was the next broken, explosive announcement.

"Thou! My brother!" breathed the half-breed; while the dying man gathered all the forces of his fast-ebbing vitality, to hurl this denunciation at the woman whose treachery had turned his fiery love into the gall and wormwood of a hate that would curse her from the very grave:

"*Maldita!* A million devils of hell rend the traitress! Ah-h-h!"

In his wild passion he struggled to his elbow and raised his clinched fist in the air. But the paroxysm was like the instantaneous flaring up

of a flame from dying embers. With that gasp he fell back dead!

It was horrible! The strong-nerved young half-breed shuddered and crossed himself. He knew that the end was come, and made no attempt to resuscitate his comrade anew.

In silence he crouched near the bed, staring at the motionless body as if fascinated.

The candle guttered, ran down, burnt to the table; the wick fell over in the grease, and went out with a sputter; from without came the distant mutterings of the receding storm, while within the cabin reigned silence and darkness.

Alone, mute, the young half-breed crouched beside his dead!

Hours passed. Dawn brightened the east. The birds burst into song. The first sounds of wakefulness were heard in the camp.

Kneeling, the young half-breed put his lips to the deaf ears of the dead, and whispered:

"Listen, oh, thou of much sorrow! Not with death, but with the blighted heart, shall I strike the treacherous one. Never! never shall she wed the *Americano* for whom she sacrificed thee!"

CHAPTER XXV.

ENTRAPPED!

In her mad rush for liberty down the narrow defile, Nellie Farnsworth had almost to step over the prostrate men; and by the lurid glare of the lightning she recognized Anselmo del Mornez, his face terrible in its contortion with rage and pain.

But while the shudder yet ran through her frame, her hand was seized, and she was hurried on down the gorge.

"But Mr. Bashford?—where is he?" she asked, supposing that her guide was one of his men.

"He and the rest are posted to cover your retreat," affirmed Shadow Jim. "Once you are safe, they can scatter and easily find security in the darkness. For God's sake, lose not a moment! The road-agents are already around. Do you not hear them coming? Ah! thank God! the horses, at last! Mount! mount! Here is my hand!"

He rested his open palm on his knee. Nellie placed her foot in it, and was lifted to the back of one of the horses. Her escort sprang into the saddle, and they were in full retreat, her horse kept close behind the other by a leading-line.

All this was done so breathlessly that the excited girl had time for only a pang of dread and a thrill of grateful tenderness, as she thought of George standing on the post of danger between her and her foes. She did not notice the absence of those sounds of deadly conflict which were to be expected. She clung to her horse, her head in a whirl of bewilderment and terror, hearing Shadow Jim constantly talking to her, not comprehending his words, but understanding vaguely that he was endeavoring to encourage her.

Through that awful night they rushed, picking their tortuous way among the crags, now buried in the depths of some densely wooded valley; now, skirt the verge of a precipice, the mountain on one side threatening to push them off into the black gulf that yawned on the other; now threading the windings of some canyon-bottom down which the water rushed so deep and rapid that horses floundered and snorted with terror. Ah! what a nightmare of accumulated horrors!

Once Shadow Jim's horse fell, casting his rider. Nellie's horse plunged wildly; and for one terrible moment it seemed as if he would break away and rush off madly into the darkness to inevitable destruction.

But Shadow Jim was as agile as a mountain cat. He alighted firmly on his feet, held fast to the leading line by which he had all along controlled Nellie's horse, and secured his own as it struggled to its feet.

"I had to blanket their hoofs to cover our trail," he explained. "It wants sharp calks to give secure footing on this storm-worn rock."

Then Nellie noticed that the horses' feet were thickly muffled, and fell with a dull thud instead of the sharp ring of steel on rock.

Soon afterward they reached a regular road, where they could advance abreast, instead of in file. Then, the bewilderment of panic abating with the feeling of present security, Nellie Farnsworth's anxiety for George Bashford came uppermost, and she began to ply her guide with questions.

Crafty Shadow Jim was ready enough of invention to meet every demand; but the girl had thus far been so wholly without suspicion, that he took it for granted that she had either never seen or had not noticed him, so that he was safe from recognition.

As he spoke in his natural voice, the storm having now passed so that there were intervals when the canyons ceased to echo with confusing sounds, it thrilled through the girl with a sense of familiarity—a familiarity which instantly called up a feeling of fear.

With a half-suppressed cry she started, fixing her attention to catch again the cadences of

that voice, so that she might recall the association.

Shadow Jim turned toward her.

At that moment a vivid glare brought out every feature of his face distinctly.

With a cry of wild alarm the betrayed girl realized her situation, and tried to rein her horse sharply to one side, so as to snatch the leading-line from her guide's hand.

"Take care!" cried Jim, warningly. "You will be down in that gully!"

"Oh, let me go!" cried Nellie. "I know you. You were playing cards with that Spaniard, day before yesterday, opposite my window."

Shadow Jim saw that he was detected. But he was not at a loss.

"Very true," he replied. "But that does not make me less your friend."

"But you are one of the terrible robbers!"

"Miss Farnsworth," replied Shadow Jim, with the polished address he could so readily assume, "I hope to be able to vindicate myself in your eyes before many hours are past. A road-agent for the time-being in appearance, I am, in fact, a detective in the employ of the Government, for the purpose of extirpating these bands of rascals which infest the mining districts. The fact that I have assisted in your escape shows that I am acting with your friends and against your enemies. Indeed, if you will pardon me for mentioning it myself, it was through me that the assistance of the Spaniard was secured."

Tiger Dick had once said of Shadow Jim that, "when he wanted to play the Sunday-school dodge he always took the medal." On this occasion he acquitted himself so creditably that poor Nellie Farnsworth was convinced of his sincerity in spite of her woman's subtle instinct.

"I beg your pardon!" she stammered.

And yet in her eyes there lingered a troubled look. If only George had himself led her to safety!

Day dawned, and still Nellie followed her guide. One fact impressed her, as little schooled as was she in mountain-craft—the wildness of the region through which they were now picking their way, having long since left the regular road.

Shadow Jim explained that he was obliged to take this short cut across the mountains to avoid miles of travel on the road.

The sun was at least two hours high when he drew rein before the mouth of a cave, and said:

"Miss Farnsworth, if you will dismount here, we will get something in the way of breakfast, a fire which I see in the saturated state of your garments you sadly need, and half an hour's rest, before continuing on our way."

"Oh! cannot we keep on without stopping?" pleaded Nellie, tremulously. "Indeed, I am not hungry. And I cannot rest until I feel safe from pursuit."

"I know your anxiety," returned Shadow Jim, with an air of sympathy; "but, believe me it is wisest as I suggest. We have a difficult and dangerous ride between us and Freeze-out Camp; and our horses need recuperation, as well as we, before they undertake it. Permit me to assist you to dismount."

He had almost to lift her from the saddle, and, when set on her feet, she found that she was so chilled and stiff and weak that she could scarcely walk.

Shadow Jim supported her into the cave, where he soon ignited a torch, and disclosed a chamber that contained previous signs of occupancy.

"Here," said Shadow Jim, with playful volubility intended to divert his companion, "here you see the charred remains of a fire. Yonder is a bed of dried mountain moss, which waits only the covering of a blanket to become as comfortable a couch as weary mortal could covet. Here is the blanket from my saddle-bags; now, with your permission, I will seat you on my improvised divan while I build a fire and procure other luxuries, which will, no doubt, surprise you, and, I hope, reconcile you to the temporary delay."

Nellie was glad to sink upon the rude couch and half-dreamily watch her escort bustle about in a cheerful manner, which went far toward dissipating her early fears.

Soon he had a merry fire crackling and diffusing a genial warmth, and from some hidden storehouse brought forth a tin coffee-pot, a tin cup, a tin plate, and sundry packages.

"You see I am all ready for housekeeping," he observed, laughingly. "But just wait until you have tested my *cuisine*."

Soon the aroma of the coffee and the odor of a venison steak, which he cleverly broiled by means of a forked stick, piqued Nellie's appetite to a very unromantic keenness.

"I bespeak your indulgence for the meagerness of my table furniture," said Shadow Jim, as he placed the product of his labors before her. "Had I anticipated the entertainment of a lady guest I should have made more generous provision. You will have to stir the sugar in your coffee with a stick, and, indeed, use a sharpened stick as a fork. I am sorry to subject you to the inconvenience of my jack-knife

for the purpose of cutting. But these biscuit are the best Freeze-out Camp affords, albeit a couple of days old."

"Oh, you are only too kind," pleaded Nellie. "Indeed, I shall manage nicely. Your steak is done to a turn, and the coffee is really refreshing. I didn't realize that I was so tired and hungry. I have much to thank you for, sir."

"My dear Miss Farnsworth," replied Shadow Jim, with an obeisance slightly exaggerated, "don't mention it, I beg of you. My poor efforts are more than repaid by your kind condescension."

Jim prided himself on being a lady's man, and was "laying himself out," it must be admitted, with good success, for his manner, viewed with the easy familiarity of a man of the world, yet delicately respectful, put Nellie quite at her ease. She forgot that "a man may smile and smile and be a villain."

"And now, if you will excuse me a moment, I will look after our horses," he said.

"Oh! but you have had no breakfast yet," interposed Nellie.

"Myself before my horse?" cried Jim. "Oh, no! He's been too good a friend to me to repay him with neglect."

And this generous sentiment won for him a pang of remorse in Nellie Farnsworth's gentle heart, as she looked back on her doubts of him.

Meanwhile, as he made his way through the corridor, this clever dissembler chuckled to himself:

"The pretty innocent! By Jove! it's a thundering shame to close her eye so gracefully! But what in the deuce can a man of sensitive feelings do? A brute would have dragged her to his den shrieking or insensible with terror. I, a man of delicacy and refinement, put her at her ease and enjoy her society. Gads! am I not a monument of loyalty, to give her up to Dick? Old man, I'm afraid you won't half appreciate the sacrifice. If I wasn't too tender-hearted to withstand a woman's tears, I'll be blowed if I wouldn't keep her for myself!"

Meanwhile, poor, deluded Nellie, no longer apprehensive, yielded insensibly to the combined influence of satisfied hunger, the genial warmth of the fire, and the reaction after painful suspense and long privation of sleep. Exhausted nature betrayed her. She thought that she would steal just one moment of rest reclining on that inviting couch during her escort's brief absence. With a sigh she stretched out her weary frame, and—*went fast asleep!*

Shadow Jim stole back on tiptoe, saw the perfect success of his scheme, and advanced boldly, gazing down upon the slumbering girl with an artist's eye for her flower-like beauty—a little piteous just now.

"No danger of arousing her," he said to himself. "For the next twenty hours she'll sleep like a top—an *angelic* top, of course!"

"I've caged my bird without a flutter. If she beat the bars when I'm not here to see, my sensitive heart will not be pained by the distressing spectacle."

How long she lay thus unconscious poor Nellie never knew. When she awoke, it was with a start of fear. She sprang upright and stared straight before her; brushed her hand across her eyes, and stared again.

The cave was as she had last seen it, save that on the opposite side of the fire crouched on the ground a something, she scarcely knew what. She made out a gray blanket, a dark face streaked across with black paint, and long, coarse black hair. The thing squatted there, mute and motionless.

For a moment the wild-eyed girl was paralyzed with fear. Then she began to tremble and pant. Then she leaped to her feet with a shriek, and sped across the cavern in mad panic.

She found the exit blocked by a huge boulder. Screaming wildly for help, she struggled madly, yet, oh, so impotently! with her frail hands to drag it away. Then she beat upon it with her tender palms in frantic despair; felt her brain reeling; turned to face the thing of terror, which had not stirred; and, with a long shriek of concentrated agony, fell lifeless on the cavern-bottom!

CHAPTER XXVI.

LOVE AT CROSS-PURPOSES.

FREEZE-OUT CAMP had suffered a downright rout. Never before had the Vigilantes had a manifestation of the real strength of the enemy with which they had to contend.

The darkness, the surprise, the savage onslaught, multiplied the actual number of assailants; and in mad panic the champions of law and order fled like sheep, scattering every man for himself, and the devil take the hindmost. Later, to insinuate a doubt of the statement that at a moment's notice the Dumb Bandit had summoned to his aid not less than a hundred men, was the signal for a fight.

Throughout the night the vanquished came straggling back to the Camp, to tell the story of disaster to dark-browed men and white-lipped women.

The wounded called for "Monseer lee Sa-

vong. Thereupon rose a new portent of evil. The surgeon-assayer was nowhere to be found.

Toward morning the Rev. Giles Goddard made his appearance. His clothes were torn and soiled with blood and dirt. He limped from a fall among the rocks. But his eye burned with a steady light. Now the real strength of the man manifested itself. His ruder fellows instantly recognized him and instinctively leaned upon his high courage.

"Men," he said, "our wounded friends must not be suffered to languish in neglect. We must form a party at once, construct litters, and fetch them into camp. Then the dead must receive our last service."

"Pardner," objected one of the miners, "I allow that thar ain't the healthiest place in this section of country. It's a mighty good thing to look after the wounded; but whar's the sense o' throwin' away 'live men after dead ones? Yer party'll git scooped in, sure! I move that we wait till things has had time to settle a bit out yonder."

The minister frowned indignant contempt on the speaker.

"That is coward's logic!" he declared, bluntly. "I hope there are few men in Freeze-out Camp willing to leave their comrades to starve or fall a prey to beasts. But you need have no fears. The way is clear. I stayed long enough to see that the road-agents evacuated the place, and to help such of our wounded as I could find and afford any relief."

"By —! you're of the right sort!" declared one who knew "cl'ar grit" when he saw it.

"Who are volunteers?" asked the minister, ignoring the compliment, the profanity of which was, let us hope, in a measure redeemed by the generous impulse which prompted it.

The response was enthusiastic. Courage begets courage.

While the men were busy preparing for their mission, the Rev. Giles Goddard felt a light hand laid on his arm. Turning, he was thrilled to the heart. A purple flush mounted to his brow, and then receded, leaving him even paler than before.

Before him stood the fairest woman in Freeze-out Camp—the Belle of Fandango Hall. She was pale with distress, yet the color came fitfully into her face as she said:

"Pardon me, sir! You found Colonel Oglethorpe's party?"

"Yes," replied the minister, in a voice which he could not clear of huskiness.

"And your party was with his in the fight?"

"Yes."

Her eyes fell; she stammered and flushed with embarrassment as she forced herself to proceed:

"There was one—a stranger here—a Mr.—Bashford—who set out with you. Was he— He has not returned, I think."

Her voice died away at the last. The pallor of fear chased the blush of confusion from her cheek. With almost startling abruptness she raised her great velvety eyes to the minister's face, with a piteous appeal, a shrinking dread in them. Unconsciously she clasped her hands.

Never before had her beauty so appealed to Giles Goddard's heart. Suffering chastened it. Her white brow, along which the soft brown hair lay in wavy lines, repelled the thought of impurity. Could those deep, truthful eyes ever melt with the voluptuous coquetry of the *dansusee*? and was this soft-voiced, lady-like woman the same who had cried with such unblushing boldness:

"Put it thar, Joel! Why, bless yer leetle heart and soul, I'm right glad to see ye!"

The minister struggled manfully with a sinking of the heart and a choking in the throat which almost forced tears into his eyes.

"Mr. Bashford was wounded—"

A quick look of terror stopped the words on his tongue.

"Not dangerously, I hope," he hastened to add. "I made him as comfortable as I could before leaving him."

"You are very good and very brave," murmured the girl. Then she added, as if to explain her interest in a stranger:

"He saved my life only day before yesterday. But—I thank you, sir—I am keeping you from other duties."

And with a grateful look, she left him.

After that the Rev. Giles Goddard went about like a man in a dream.

But presently even he became aware that a wave of unusual excitement had swept over the crowd.

"Ah! *mes beaux garçons!*" cried a cheery voice, "I have ze bliss to be vis you again. Tra! tra! So! so-o! Ha! ha! ha!"

And shaking hands right and left, Monsieur Carrival made his way through the crowd, the heartiness of his reception proving that the "boys" reciprocated the affection of "Johnny Crappo."

"But whar in thunder hev you been? We begun to think you'd shot the flume," declared an enthusiastic miner.

"Ah! my children," cried the Frenchman, "vone adventure!—*romantique! charmante! ver!* fine!"

And striking a melodramatic attitude:

"*Tiens!* You vill beleaf me? I haf seen ze fine fellow, Tigair Deek! *Allons, messieurs! Tableaux!* Ha! ha! ha!"

"The deuce ye have! How in thunder did you git to see him?"

Then, to a gaping audience whose rapt attention must have satisfied even his national passion for stage effects, "Johnny Crappo" narrated his adventure, personating all the characters in turn, and bringing out every striking incident with ludicrous exaggeration of expletive and gesture. He lionized Tiger Dick and raved over Barbara Musgrave's Amazonian beauty.

Enfin, messieurs, he concluded, "I am led away, vis ze eyes blindfold. I am plunged into ze cavernous dungeon! *Eh bien!* I haf ze treatment like ze prince; bote, *grand ciel!* I haf ze security against escape—vat you say?—*you bet!* Ha! ha! Ze queen keep me preeson-air zat I shall medicine her lord. *Allons, messieurs!* eet ees of ze age mediaeval!"

"Ze hour pass."

"Boom! Red fire! Tableau!"

"*Sacrebleu!* shall ze heavens fall? Ze mountain tremble! Excitement! My guard lose his head! Stop, my children! do I lofe ze empris-onment? *He's-s-st!* I slip away!"

"Why didn't ye knock over the blasted skunk that was a-guardin' of ye?" cried a sturdy fellow, carried away with the interest of the drama, brought out by the Frenchman's expressive pantomime almost as vividly as if presented on a stage.

"I? Andre Carrival? I?" cried the Frenchman, in wild dismay. "I zat shall *heal* ze wound—I shall *make* ze wound? Shall I set ze boyee ze bad example? *Mon Dieu!* I am undone!"

And "Monseer lee Savong's" despair transcended words.

But a white-faced woman appeared at his side.

"Are there not those who are suffering for the doctor's aid?" she asked, deprecation and reproach blending in the look with which she appealed to the Rev. Giles Goddard.

He flushed scarlet.

"Friends," he said, gravely, "we are properly reproved. This is no time for words. Every moment of delay is fraught with pain for those who await succor."

M. Le Savant's dolor, when informed of the calamity that had fallen on the Camp, was as extravagant in expression as had been his delight over his own adventure a moment before. He looked like a man who had never known how to smile.

In marked contrast with the voluble Frenchman, the Rev. Giles Goddard rode at the head of his men, silent and abstracted.

When they reached the scene of the conflict, he was astonished to see a woman ride up.

Fawn-eyed Fan had followed the relief party, fearing that if she applied for leave to accompany them she would be refused. She was very pale. Her eyes moved about in search of something with a great longing and a great dread in them.

The Rev. Giles Goddard rode up to her.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "This shocking scene is no place for a lady."

"Do not censure me," she pleaded. "I am not afraid of wounds, and I may be of some use. Where is Mr. Bashford? I owe him some return for his great service to me."

Averting his face and biting his lips, the minister led her to where George lay very much like a dead man.

His extreme pallor, the blood that was on him, his motionlessness, terrified the girl. With a cry of distress she slipped to the ground and knelt beside him.

He opened his eyes, frowning as he scanned her in seeming bewilderment; then a smile of glad recognition broke over his face, and suddenly catching her hands, he cried:

"Oh, my darling! And are you safe at last?"

Fawn-eyed Fan started back, scarlet to the tips of her ears.

The Rev. Giles Goddard turned as pale as death.

George fell to kissing rapturously the hands he still held.

"Oh, Nellie! my sweet!" he cried, "to think that you are restored to me! When I jumped over the precipice after you, I must have struck my head, I think. It has kept buzzing ever since. But we won't speak of that now; will we, my dearest?"

"Confound that fellow! He's here again with his—'Ex-coose me, (hic!) cunnell!' Then take the flask! Now, get out, you dog! Ha! ha! ha! He has tormented me half to death. One was almost forced to laugh at his absurdity, even in the midst of distress."

"But, oh, my precious one! how the loss of you has wrung my heart! Nellie! Nellie! what is the matter, dear? Have I startled you?"

Now it was Fawn-eyed Fan's turn to whiten with pain. She turned her piteous quivering face toward the minister, and said:—

"Don't you see? He's not himself!"

With a great pity in his heart for this girl, which mastered even his distress on his own account, the minister said, gently:—

"Yes, I see. Let me relieve you. I will see that he has every care."

"Oh, no! no!" objected the girl. "If you will kindly send the doctor at once!"

Yielding to the appeal in her eyes, the minister turned away.

M. LeSavant, like every one else in Freeze-out Camp, was Fawn-eyed Fan's devoted slave; so he came to her at once, and soon had her especial patient on a stretcher, on his way to the Camp.

Not to Fandango Hall, but to a cabin whose owner had been killed in the pursuit of Tiger Dick, Fawn-eyed Fan had her charge conveyed, there to watch over him night and day, while he tossed in delirium, or lay in the stupor of utter prostration.

When the fever was upon him, he always took her for Nellie Farnsworth, and rent her heart by making love to her in that character; but she sat ever patiently, holding his hot hands, and soothing him by assurances of her love, and caresses which he received and returned as coming from another. She could have cried out with pain when, between the kisses he took from the lips she never denied him, he called her his darling Nellie, and planned their married future. Ah! it was the saddest ordeal that loving woman ever passed through.

The "boys" burdened her with tenders of assistance; but it was the Rev. Giles Goddard, so different from all the rest, who did everything for her, often before she herself was conscious of the want. Had the wounded man been his brother, he could not have more generously supplied his needs. Fan's pathetic gratitude, knowing as he did that it sprung from her love for his rival, was at the same time lotus and wormwood to him.

Meanwhile, Col. Ogleshorpe, cruelly lacerated in his conflict with Barbara Musgrave's mastiff from whose terrible fangs he had narrowly escaped death, was stretched on a bed of pain and helplessness. His greatest distress was the thought that he could not undertake the rescue of Jim Farnsworth's child, the fact of whose captivity was mercifully kept from her father, who lay between life and death.

The Rev. Giles Goddard would gladly have risked his own life in this cause; but he did not feel justified in assuming the leadership of men whose lives his ignorance of mountain-craft must expose to inevitable jeopardy, with no possible prospect of success.

Josh Starkey, who, Col. Ogleshorpe declared, would be the right man in the right place, had left the Camp on the very morning on which all this network of calamity began.

Thus deprived of her leaders, Freeze-out Camp was completely demoralized. Business, save that of gambling, was almost wholly suspended. But one theme was discussed—the dreaded prospect that the victorious road-agents might be tempted to strike a retaliatory blow, and wipe the place out of existence!

This was the state of public mind which made it possible for Tiger Dick to perpetrate the boldest piece of dare-devil effrontery in all the checkered history of western mining life. What it was and how it succeeded, my patient reader may learn by accompanying me in the following chapters.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE SHADOW OF A COMING HORROR.

By Boss Kane's orders Sleepy Jake was borne to his cabin; and as he had no "pardner" and was indeed far from a general favorite, the "boys" were only too glad to turn into their warm bunks, and leave him to "come round by himself." So no one was the wiser when just before daybreak Boss Kane announced to his chief that the sentinel had recovered his scattered wits, and the Dumb Bandit entered the cabin alone, for an interview which did not last more than five minutes. During that brief colloquy Sleepy Jake received a cue to which he played with creditable cleverness.

Shortly after the camp was astir, he made his appearance, rubbing and blinking his eyes and looking very much like one whose wits were just returning from wool-gathering. To the group that gathered about him, bantering him about his "knowledge box," he replied:—

"But did they git away with her? I done the best I could. I reckon I salted that infernal Greaser fur all he was worth. But they downed me."

"They? Her? What the deuce are ye chinin' about?"

"Brace up, pardner. You're foggy yet in the upper story."

"You fell asleep on yer post and dreamt it all, Jake."

The boisterous laugh went round, while Sleepy Jake replied to his tormentors, with simulated annoyance:—

"Ef one o' you boosy stoughton bottles had been on duty, they could 'a' dragged the girl across the bridge o' yer nose, an' you'd have only—"

"Girl? What girl?"

"Why the prisoner—Miss Farnsworth, of course. Would you call Aunt Chloe?"

"The prisoner?"

"Miss Farnsworth!"

The road-agents stared at each other and at the butt of their wit, who quickly turned the tables on them.

"Now you're the ones that's foggy. You don't mean to say that you let her git off?"

"Let her git off? Now what are ye gassin' about?"

"And she's away, and you don't know it yet?" cried Sleepy Jake, in well-simulated astonishment. "Must I tell you that that infernal traitor and his crowd pulled the Retreat; and you'll likely find your prisoner in Freeze-out Camp by this time?"

Then came confused questions and answers, in which Sleepy Jake conveyed to the gaping road-agents the clever little fiction that, no sooner had he shot Anselmo del Mornez, in the act of assisting the prisoner to escape, than he was set upon by a party coming from the other direction, doubtless those who had suborned the "Greaser" to treachery, and knocked senseless.

Profanity was next in order. Then Boss Kane was summoned, apprised of this new development, and followed in a body to the dining-hall, which was soon after filled with the clamor of Aunt Chloe's voice, as with tears and wild gesticulations she "clared to goodness" and called "de bressed Lo'd" to witness "dat she didn't hab nuffin' to do wid Missy Nellie's 'duction! Oh, golly, I's done! De Cap 'll skulp dis chile, shore! But ef de Lo'd chuck de ole aunty down in de debil's back kitchen dis bressed minute, she swah dat dey muss 'a' gone up froo de chimbley, kase she don't wake up when dey was a-skittin' acrost de flo' of dis hyah kitchen! My boys knows dat I's a-sweatin' fur 'em from mo'nin' till night, a-wrastlin' wid hog-meat an' hominy, an' my ole body as hebbly as a po'poise. I's dead beat, an' my ole bones ache, so dat I sleep like a coon in a holler log."

All of which is but a specimen of the 'wordy self-justification with which the old aunty appealed to "her boys," collectively and severally, as long as she could get any one to listen to her.

But "de Cap" did not "skulp" his faithful old servant, nor even reprove her for remissness of duty.

A few brief, stern orders sent the men to a hurried investigation, in which the effort to "pick up" the trail of the fugitives was a failure, thanks to the muffling of the hoofs of Shadow Jim's horses. The thought of pursuit was abandoned as hopeless after so many hours' start.

And now a hush fell upon the Rangers' Retreat. There was no noisy roistering in the dining-hall, as usual. The men gathered in knots, communing in low, guarded tones, and glancing with gloomy frowns in the direction of the cabin in which lay the dead Spaniard, from whose side his faithful watcher, the half-breed, Pedro, had not stirred, save for one brief absence to procure candles which now burned at the head and foot of the dead.

Boss Kane selected two men and led them away up the glen. They bore on their shoulders two shovels, an ax and a hatchet. They looked grave, like men selected for a solemn duty. With an expression of awe their fellows looked after them.

When they returned, something over an hour later, they kept together, aloof from the other men. They were not interrogated, nor did they volunteer anything with reference to their absence.

Then the inactive suspense was resumed. They were awaiting the return of Shadow Jim, who, the spy of the gang, was supposed to be now learning the state of things in Freeze-out Camp. It will be remembered that he took his departure the previous morning. No one dreamed of connecting him in any way with Nellie Farnsworth's escape.

Toward night he returned; and it goes without saying that that consummate actor failed in nothing pertaining to his part.

Night fell. The awed hush that had brooded over the camp all day deepened. An anxious, expectant look was in the eyes of all.

Aunt Chloe sat on a low stool close to her fire, as if cold. She trembled, and started apprehensively at every unexpected sound. Ever and anon she rocked herself, clasping and unclasping her hands, and murmuring low, indistinguishable sounds, a sort of chant—perhaps some heathen incantation from that mass of superstition which still prevails among the negroes of the South.

Just before midnight the suspense culminates.

The Dumb Bandit and Boss Kane appear. At a sign from the latter a stir takes place among the men, and the darkness is suddenly illuminated by the red light of smoking torches, of which each road-agent bears one.

During this interval, Aunt Chloe has fled into the room lately occupied by Nellie Farnsworth and hidden under the bed-clothes. But to her excited fancy the absence of the girl makes it seem like a room left tenantless by recent death; and with a cry of terror, as the thought flashes across her mind, she leaps from the bed, rushes out of the room, barricades the door, and again crouches before the fire with her apron thrown over her head.

Without, the men form in procession. The dead Spaniard is brought out on a bier. The

half-breed follows, with bowed head and an air of depression, his drooping eyelids hiding a dull, vengeful glare that might put Anselmo del Mornez's betrayers on their guard, were it disclosed, and were he less a boy.

Not a word is spoken. In solemn silence the weird procession moves away in the direction taken a few hours before by Boss Kane and his men.

Half a mile from the camp they come upon a shallow grave. The bier is set down beside it. The men stand about in a circle, holding their smoking links above their heads.

The Dumb Bandit stands a little apart, pale and struggling to repress a nervous working of the features, leaving Boss Kane to conduct the ceremony, which is done without the uttering of a word.

There in the wilderness, at the dead hush of midnight, by the glare of torchlight, is begun a terrible rite!

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A TRAITOR'S BURIAL.

In silence the dead man is laid in the grave on his back, with no coffin, with no preparation, with his blood upon him, quiet as he fell!

At the last, the half-breed steps one foot down into the shallow grave, draws a silk handkerchief from his pocket, and gazes with a sad appeal up at Boss Kane. Receiving no intimation of dissent, he spreads the handkerchief over the face of the dead, and withdraws.

Boss Kane steps into the grave, lifts a corner of the handkerchief, takes from beneath it a small wooden crucifix which the half breed has covertly left on the lips of the dead, a last tribute to his friend, and restores it to Pedro without a word.

The youth shrinks back with a look of horror; then his eyes fall, hiding a blaze of deadly resentment; and with a trembling hand, yet a face like bronze, he receives back the talisman.

A shudder runs round the circle of spectators, and more than one involuntarily crosses himself. Steeped in crime, long strangers to the observances of religion, it yet strikes a chill to the hearts of the men to see a fellow-creature denied in his grave this symbol of their common faith.

The earth is shoveled in and tramped down until it is level, leaving no mound to mark the spot.

Then the two men who accompanied Boss Kane in the afternoon bring forward a thing that attracts every eye. It is a long stake, sharpened at one end.

By careful measurement a point is found directly above the center of the body which lies hidden in the earth. By measurement also the stake is driven at this spot until every one knows that its point touches the pulseless breast.

Then one of the men steps back, leaving the other standing near the stake, holding the handle of a heavy maul, the head of which rests on the ground. The most brutal fellow in the band has been selected to initiate a terrible ceremonial.

Boss Kane takes out his watch and holds it open in his palm.

The road-agents then stand for perhaps ten minutes of dead silence and waiting during which the chill of superstitious dread creeps into the very marrow of their bones!

As the hands of the watch mark twelve—all know that this is what has been waited for—Boss Kane closes the watch and makes a sign with his hand.

The man swings the beetle over his head, and brings it down with a force that settles the stake a foot. All realize that it must have been driven clear through the body.

An involuntary murmur of horror runs round the circle.

Boss Kane stamps his foot, and glares around upon the shuddering band with a look that makes them quail.

At a sign from him each takes his turn, adding a blow that drives the stake further into the ground.

When the turn of the half-breed, Pedro, comes, the youth receives the maul, essays to lift it, but lets it sink again to the ground. He trembles violently; the perspiration drips from his forehead; all see his anguish.

In his soul he cries:

"Hush, brother of my adoption! Cry not out against this ignominious blow! Look you!—it is to lull them to sleep, that I may the more surely avenge thee!"

Then nerving himself and setting his teeth hard, he swings the maul aloft. But his heart fails him; the maul wavers, then falls to the ground; while in anguish of spirit the faithful friend cries aloud, the first words that have broken upon that terrible scene:

"Oh, mother of God! I cannot! I cannot!"

Even those brutal men are deeply moved. Their sympathies are with him, yet they dare not move, or manifest them by sound or gesture.

The Dumb Bandit—nay, let us call her by her woman's name!—Barbara Musgrave has watched this struggle with a perturbation of soul, scarcely less than that of the half-breed

himself. She hears his heart-wrung cry, sees the agonized appeal in his despairing face, and, striding forward, she anticipates Boss Kane, who is about to enforce the duty, and takes the mail from Pedro's hand.

The young half-breed shrinks back, regarding her with a glare of intense hatred which in her excitement she does not notice.

She, in turn, is communing with her secret soul.

"Dick! Dick! it is for thee! For thee I pluck up from my heart all womanly tenderness, all mercy, and heap this ignominy on the victim of my own treachery!"

Then, while she is half crazed with conflicting emotions—love, pity, remorse, and savage anger against the dead man whose threatening passion has brought all this misery upon her—she lifts the beetle ("woman-fashion," directly before her) and adds her blow to the stake which transfixes the traitor.

The half breed stares at her and shivers, as he whispers to himself:—

"Ah Dios! She can do it—she! She is possessed of the devil!"

Such is the Traitor's Burial! The memory of that night never passes from those who participate in its barbarous rite.

Days passed. Tiger Dick was himself again. The road agent band were summoned before their chief's cabin, to listen to an important announcement.

When they were assembled, the door opened, and issued therefrom Tiger Dick, and on his arm a lady the sight of whom made those rough fellows stare and rub their eyes. There was something about her familiar and yet unfamiliar.

She was dressed in the plainest of woolen gowns; but her noble figure would not be disguised. Her face was that of a queen at her coronation! How her eyes blazed! How proudly she carried her head!

"My men!" she cried, in clear, ringing, musical tones, "the time has come to throw off my disguise and break the silence as unnatural as irksome to a woman. Do you know me?"

There was a momentary hush, while she looked about on those eager faces.

Then began a murmur which swelled to a shout, a yell, a roar of enthusiastic recognition and homage. Hats were thrown into the air; men shook hands and capered about each other in a grotesque sort of dance expressive of congratulation; everybody proposed "three times three and a tiger," and broke off to join in a new cheer before the first was fairly executed.

A fiery spot appeared in either of Barbara Musgrave's cheeks. She knew that this wild enthusiasm was a tribute to her beauty. She turned to see how her triumph affected Tiger Dick. She saw a smile of pleasure and pride on his face. That she prized more highly than all the noisy demonstration going on before them.

While love caroled in her heart, she raised her hand to command silence, and went on:—

"I am Jack Musgrave's daughter."

Then the air rung again with cheers for Jack Musgrave, followed by a like compliment to his daughter.

"For your services to me in the past, I have to thank you," pursued Barbara; "but the time has come for me to resign the duties of active leadership."

This announcement was received in dead silence, which showed the disappointment of the men. Their romantic fancies had caught at the idea of being ruled over by a queen—and so queenly a queen.

"You all understand," continued Barbara, "that our government is that of an elective dictatorship. Your leader finds his authority in your free consent. You accepted me on the recommendation of my father. On retiring from the office, I commend to you Mr. Richard Langley, better known to you all and to the world as 'Tiger Dick.' Touching his qualities as a leader, no words of mine are necessary anywhere between the foot-hills and the Golden Gate. For the rest, let him speak for himself."

Crowds are all alike. Somebody proposed three cheers for Tiger Dick, and the response was hearty enough to satisfy the most exacting candidate for public favor.

Only, Boss Kane did not lead the demonstration!

"Men," said Tiger Dick, taking the word from the abdicating queen, whose eyes, as they gazed upon him, told an open secret, "let me begin by thanking you for your cordial indorsement of your retiring leader. You will understand that I have a right to do this, when I tell you that if you accept me, it will scarcely be a transfer of authority, since Jack Musgrave's daughter will continue as the power behind the throne, in the character of my wife and your queen."

At that delight ran wild. It seemed as if no antic was too extravagant as an expression of the prevailing sentiment, until a burly ruffian leaped upon a stump and, holding his hat above his head ready to swing it, shouted:

"Gents, I move that Tiger Dick an' Jack Musgrave's daughter run this thing in double

harness! What d'ye say? Raise 'er, boys!—raise 'er!"

And they did "raise 'er," with a shout that made the grim old mountains ring again.

Tiger Dick made graceful acknowledgments, both for himself and on behalf of Jack Musgrave's daughter, who stood rosy red and yet beaming with a pleasure which was new to her life. In that moment she said to her heart that the heaven of her future was without a cloud. Ah! she did not note Boss Kane's faint enthusiasm, nor Shadow Jim's knowing smile, nor the half-breed's stony composure!

"But," continued Tiger Dick, "if I am to assume command, I like not half-way measures. I propose to move on the enemy's works at once, and shall begin by paying my respects this night to my particular friend, Jim Farnsworth, and leaving my card at Fandango Hall!"

This bold beginning awakened wild enthusiasm for the new commander. He was "chaired" on the shoulders of his devoted followers and borne in triumph.

That night, unattended and with arms nowhere visible on his person, a stranger entered Freeze-out Camp, and walked boldly, yet with no swagger, up to the hotel entrance of Fandango Hall, where its proprietor, Mottle-mugged Mike, was enjoying a quiet whiff of his dhudheen in the starlight.

"Have I the honor of addressing the landlord of this hotel?" asked he, politely.

"It's right ye are, me bowld buccaneer," replied the Irishman, scanning the new-comer with a critical eye. "An' phwat may yez be wantin' ov me?"

"I understand that Mr. James Farnsworth is putting up at your house."

"He is. An' likely to shtop, bad luck till the spalpeen that tipped him that playful rap an' the scone!"

"I should like to see him, if you please."

There was something about the excessive politeness of this stranger that impressed Mottle-mugged Mike unpleasantly. If he wasn't a "tenderfoot"—and somehow he hadn't the air of one—he must be chaffing. So the Irishman replied rather roughly:

"The divil an' all! Ye would, now! An' who moight yer lordship be that's wantin' to see Jim Farnsworth?"

"I!" replied the stranger, pleasantly. "Oh! I'm an old friend of his. You may announce me, if you please, as Tiger Dick."

Mottle-mugged Mike's pet dhudheen dropped and broke unheeded from his gaping mouth, as he began to back away, gasping:

"Be the powers o' Moll Kelly!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

A "WICKED" PAIR.

ONCE more we enter Fandango Hall. Let us glance about the room, with its bare wooden walls and smoke-grimed rafters lighted by tallow tips attached in their own grease to wooden sconces driven in crevices in the walls, and make the acquaintance of some of these "boys," who are pounding the tables with such resounding thumps, as they cover inoffensive nine-spots with warlike bowers, or "knock the socks" off "two pair" with "three of a kind."

As the lights are above their heads, their broad-brimmed hats, slouched low over their brows, throw their faces into shadow, and give to one and all a decidedly-brigandish appearance.

But here are two in a corner by themselves, with an especially hang-dog look.

If they are breeding mischief, perhaps we can "drop on their little game."

He of the ponderous frame, beneath whose black hat can be seen only a perfect forest of unkempt beard and a villainous scowl, as from time to time he casts his bloodshot eyes about the room, speaks first.

"I say, Jim, d'ye b'lieve he's got the sand?" he growls from behind his beard.

The man spoken to is of that slight yet symmetrical build which gives great agility of movement, his face as dark as any Spaniard's, spare and flexible, admitting of a wide range of expression, with eyes small, piercing and yet black.

In matters of dress, in the training of his certainly beautiful hair and mustache, and in the care evidently bestowed on his teeth and fingernails, this man borders on dandyism. His make-up, as a whole, stamps him in unmistakable characters:

"DANGEROUS!"

Even we who know him so well scarcely recognize him till he speaks. His voice tells us that it is Shadow Jim in disguise.

"Sand? You bet, cully!" he replies, decidedly. "He said that he would be hyer before ten o'clock; and whatever Dick says he will do, you may depend on, if I'm any judge of human nature. But, Boss, what's the matter with you to-night? You're in a remarkably unamiable mood, even for you; and that's saying a good deal, my gentle demon!"

With a frown blacker even than before, if possible, Boss Kane muttered an unintelligible reply.

Then silence fell between the two worthies, Jim nonchalantly rolling a Spanish cigarette, with loose tobacco and a small square of tissue paper, and Boss Kane glaring about him with pure devilish malice.

Presently the latter burst forth venomously.

"I say, Jim, who's that fancy cock over thar tricked out like some doggone fool of a stage-actor?—curse him!"

"My wife's relations may know him; I don't," replied Jim, facetiously. "One of the Southern gentry, I take it. Fire-eaters, you know."

"Somethin' tells me I'll slit his fire-eatin' gullet fur 'im one o' these hyar days!"

"Eh? Why, I thought he was a stranger to you?"

"So he is."

"Then what the deuce is your quarrel with him?"

"Nothin'. I don't like his style."

"H'm!" ejaculated Shadow Jim with a peculiar smile and a shrug of the shoulders, "if you jump into every man the cut of whose coat don't suit you you'll have a gay and festive time during this earthly pilgrimage. But this is a free country, old man. If you're 'spillin' for a fight go in and win. I reckon yonder gentleman, if I'm any judge, will accommodate you with anything you're pleased to nominate."

"Curse him! I've half a mind to reach for him, anyway!"

"Confound it, Boss! what is the row? What have you been eating? What has upset your stomach?"

For reply Boss Kane whirled upon his companion with a perfect demoniac glare in his wolfish eyes, and, setting his ponderous fist on the table between them, and bending forward until his face was within a few inches of that of the other, regarded him fixedly and without a word for perhaps twenty seconds.

That Shadow Jim was fully equal to the test was a rare proof of his nerve. After the first flash of the eye his face expressed only mild surprise and curiosity.

When satisfied with his scrutiny, Boss Kane sunk back into his former position, a smile of perhaps excusable self-complacency curled Jim's lip, and he asked, pleasantly:

"Well, pardner, what do you make of me?"

"Jim," said Kane deliberately, still watching his companion narrowly, "you're a squar' man!"

"Did you ever see me any other way?" was the quiet interrogatory.

"Waal, no, I never seen you up to no snide games. But you've got it in yer looks. Excuse me, pardner; but it's thar in your mug—it is, fur a fact!"

A wicked, cruel smile flitted over Shadow Jim's face, and his eyes contracted until they glittered like two black diamonds.

"You're hard to please to-night, Boss!" he said, blowing a fine curl of smoke from his lips and viewing his comrade steadily through it. "First it was yonder stranger; now I don't suit you. In the next deal you'll have to stock the cards on the Almighty, and have the world made up to order."

"You've got it in yer looks," repeated the other, not heeding his companion's reply, "but curse you! if ye split on me, I'll break ye in two!"

Shadow Jim seemed not at all disturbed by this ferocious threat.

"Hold on, my gentle friend," he said, betraying no anger, however, either in look or tones. "You're at liberty to begin to 'break' whenever you feel like undertaking the job; but, meanwhile, I'll trouble you not to curse me, even in your kittenish way. I haven't much mouth; but I always expect to be treated like a gentleman."

"That's all right," said Kane, with a wave of his hand. "I hain't no call to complain ag'in' you yet. Treat me white, and we're solid."

"Thank you," said Jim, with a covert sneer. "And all this, I presume, is preliminary to telling me what has disturbed your usually sweet temper to-night."

"Pardner, I don't mind tellin' ye. I'm sot to tell somebody. I allow I'd bu'st, ef I kep' it in much longer. But, look a-hyar, cul—you owe me somethin'!"

"Yes!"

"I saved your bacon fur ye, onc't, when, only fur me, you'd 'a' had the tightest squeak fur it that ever any man had."

"That's so, old man," admitted Jim, but in a watchful, speculative way, rather than with any manifestation of gratitude.

"Waal, pardner," pursued Kane, almost appealingly, "I reckon that that thar'll come in some's, an' keep ye from cuttin' the dirt from under my feet, even if yer nateral cussedness—Excuse me, pardner! I have to call things by their right names; 'cause I don't know no highfalutin' ways o' smoothin' of 'em down, untel they sound purty—like you do, Jim. As I was a-sayin', even if yer nateral cussedness minded ye to play it low down on me, you'd remember as how I jest as good as held yer scalp on, when ye had a doggoned loud call fur to have it lifted off; an' ye'd think better on it, an' give me the squar' white article."

"H'm!" ejaculated Shadow Jim, smiling and

stretching himself in a patronizing way. "That isn't much of a concession to my manhood. But drive ahead my friend."

"Waal, Jim, this hyar's what sticks in my crop:—It begins to look as if we was playin' a blame fool's game. The boss pulls us hither an' yon; says 'do this' an' 'do that'; but never a whack of business. Ef he was a-washin' it down with rocks all the while, nobody'd squeal. But dog my cats ef this pullin' chestnuts out o' the fire fur somebody else's eatin' ain't about played out!—it's gittin' monotonous!—it's be-ginnin' to sour on my stomach, fur one!"

"The boss?" repeated Shadow Jim, with a sidelong glance out of the corner of his eye at the flushed, excited face of his companion.

That brief and seemingly innocent interrogatory was in fact a "stinger" between the eyes. It phased Boss Kane for a moment. He may have grown pale beneath his shaggy beard. He hesitated to put into words the treason that was stirring in his ambitious breast.

But presently he rallied, reached across the table, and seized Shadow Jim's hand in an iron gripe, watching his face all the time like a hawk, while he muttered in a low, husky whisper:—

"You've struck it, cul. I might as well out with it first as last. It's this new man!"

"Dick?"

"Dick!"

Shadow Jim's eyes contracted; but otherwise his face was utterly devoid of expression.

"H'm!" he said, "what do you propose to do about it?"

So, craftily, he drew his man on!

And with a burst, as if he could no longer restrain himself, Boss Kane showed his hand.

"Thar hain't but one God Almighty in this hyar universe! Thar never was a man but thar was another jist as good! Perhaps thar's them as kin give the boys as fair a show as Mr. Tiger Dick, the best day he ever lived! Hey! By — I mean business—every time!"

As his excitement increased to its culmination, he struck the table a sledge-hammer blow with his fist and half rose from his seat.

Shadow Jim seemed neither startled nor surprised. He sat smoking his cigarette calmly, meditatively—viewing the thin spirals of blue smoke as they ascended from his lips toward the rafters.

Boss Kane watched and waited for his decision with bated breath. Gradually a look of anxiety and germinating suspicion began to darken his face, and the fires of a murderous hate to gleam in his eyes, much as a wild beast driven to bay.

After an interval which was severely trying to the nerves of his less intellectual comrade, Jim threw away his now consumed cigarette, drew a deep breath, and faced squarely round.

"Kane," he asked, "will you take a fool's advice?"

"That depends on what it is," said the other, guardedly.

"It's as free as the air you breathe," was the careless rejoinder. "You can take it, or let it alone. If you do take it, you'll be sure not to get your fingers burnt—that's one recommendation. If you don't—"

He indicated the alternative by a shrug of his shoulders, and pursued:—

"But, to come to the point, it's this:—Don't try to buck against Dick!"

"—Dick!" almost howled the disaffected partisan, with a savage oath.

Again Shadow Jim shrugged his shoulders, in his coolly sarcastic way.

"That's all right," he said, "provided you have the sand to back it up. As I said before—it's a free country. Every man makes his own level. It's grab all, and hold who can. For one, I'm content to—"

"Content be blowed! You and I can make ourselves with a turn of the hand."

"But we'll not turn that hand," said Shadow Jim, quietly.

"Hah!" ejaculated the would-be traitor. "What d'ye mean?"

"That I am not quite ready for a change of commanders yet!" was the cool rejoinder.

Boss Kane's hand sought the butt of his revolver.

Before he could draw it, he was looking down the bore of Shadow Jim's weapon, just visible over the edge of the table, yet so held that no one else in the room could see it. The easy grace of Shadow Jim's posture, his nonchalant air, gave no indication that he was threatening the life of his comrade.

"Remember your oath," he said, quietly. "By its provisions your life is now forfeit to me. But, Kane, aside from my personal regard for you, if you were to step down and out, the duties of your office, with which I don't care to be bored, would devolve upon me. On the other hand, it won't pay you to remove me at the risk of getting under you a man who may covet your shoes. So you see, our mutual safety lies in the fact that we are more useful to each other alive than dead. But you mustn't let your ambition soar too high either. Come! return to your allegiance and common sense!"

The black scowl with which the disaffected villain prepared to yield suddenly gave place to a look of apprehension, as the door of the saloon

opened, and, dropping his eyes, he muttered, hurriedly:

"Hold hard! Here he comes! Mum's the word, pardner, on what I've said! Cheese it, cully! Keep it dark."

CHAPTER XXX.

A BOLD EXPLOIT.

AS Mottle-mugged Mike backed away from his suave guest, he put his hand on the latch of the door leading into the bar; but Tiger Dick interposed, smoothly:

"I beg your pardon! I will trouble you to show me to Mr. Farnsworth's room."

During the past few days Freeze-out Camp had listened with mouth agape to the most marvelous stories of Tiger Dick's early career. He was said to have had a private grave-yard in the rear of his faro lay-out, at Yellow-sand Gulch, where the victims of his playful moods were interred in rows, each grave being marked by a whitewashed endboard bearing the device of a tiger's paw, the number of the "stiff" and the date of the "leetele onpleasantness." When he "showed a man out"—so ran the tale—it was invariably with some graceful compliment or apology. In short, when Tiger Dick was markedly polite to a man, that man called in his friends and made his will.

Perhaps, however, it was only an Irishman's natural hospitality which made the proprietor of Fandango Hall say:

"Yis, surr! Av coorse, surr! Sure it's a thrate I count it to serve so foine a gentleman! This waay, yer honor. Bewayur of the step, surr, lest ye should sthroike yer fut."

"Thank you," said Dick, genially.

As he was ushered into Jim Farnsworth's room, he turned, and, fixing his eyes upon those of the now bowing and scraping landlord, said, with his sweetest smile:

"I intend to drop into your dance-house for a moment before I go. Give the boys the freedom of the bar in my name. Of course the ladies drink champagne. By the way, I understand that you have a famous beauty here. If she will honor me with a dance I shall count it a great favor."

Mottle-mugged Mike was overpowered by this princely patronage. He bowed almost to the floor, reflecting that "such a gentleman born would scorn to look too closely into an account, or trouble himself with the making of change!"

"Sure, yer honor's condescension to my poor house," he began; but Tiger Dick, with a truly lordly squaring of the code of politeness by the rule of his own pleasure, shut the door on his blarney.

The tiger walked directly to the bedside of the wounded sheriff, and sat down in the one chair which the room contained.

"Jim," he said, "you know me well enough to know that I come to your sick-bed in no other character than that of a friend. In the match of wits, we've never given up any points to each other for old acquaintance sake; but I don't believe you'll say that I ever played it low down on you. Jim, old man, I'm sorry to see you here—I am, I give you my word!"

"I believe you, Dick," replied the Frisco Sheriff, with a faint, wan smile. "You won't think I bear you any grudge for the last round—"

"Of course you don't!—of course you don't!"

"There's only one thing, Dick."

"Eh?"

"You oughtn't to have spoilt that driver. He was a good driver, and wouldn't have been in your way."

"By Jove! Jim, I've been cut up about that. It was beastly!—a clear waste of powder and ball. But it was such a tight squeak, and I had the bracelets on. The confounded things always did upset me! That's my only excuse. There! let's not think of it."

"You're on the up-grade—eh? I would have spared you, if I could—you know that. And I hope to see you out of this soon."

"I'll let you know when I am," replied the sheriff, with sly humor.

"Oh! of course I expect you to come back at me," laughed Dick. "But I wouldn't delay your recovery a single day on that account. Meanwhile, if there is anything I can do for you, don't hesitate to command me."

But it is needless to pursue further that peculiar interview. These men, who could make war to the death against each other, and yet preserve a whimsical sort of friendship, were true sons of the West. As they put it, their hospitality, "all in the way of business," need not interfere with their fraternizing as kindred spirits in point of pluck.

Meanwhile, Mottle-mugged Mike had descended to the bar.

"B'ys!" he cried, "s'intis presarve us! he's heur!—undher this roof, this blessed minute!"

"He! Who?" was the cry.

"Tiger Dick—no less!"

There were black looks and ejaculations of wonder, not unmixed with apprehension.

"Sure, it's wid Mither Farnsworth, he is. An' he's comin' below."

"What!—hyar?"

"Where else?"

"In this room?"

"Divil a less."

"Boys, he don't come hyar without hackin'!"

"Is that wan o' the wise sayin's?"

The men gazed about on one another distrustfully. In a "live" camp like Freeze-out, strangers were constantly coming and going. There were many then in the room not known to one another. Moreover, the oldest inhabitant, Mottle-mugged Mike himself, or even a member of the Vigilance Committee, might be in secret league with the outlaws.

"B'ys," pursued the landlord, "he'd not come amongst us as bowld as brass, if any man could knock him over wid a bit of a shtick. It's well enough to see yer way before ye open the ball wid the likes av him, I'm thinkin'. He's that polite he'd be the independent candidate afther votes. But he comes well recommended in wan point—he stonds thrate for the house."

Whatever their antipathy to Tiger Dick in the character of a road-agent, the "boys" had no objection to him whatever as a "setter-up of drinks." Their brows, late clouded with gloom, soon glowed with the rosy smile of good-fellowship. Seen through the bottom of a whisky-glass, Tiger Dick became quite a hero.

But Mottle-mugged Mike knew that these princely outlaws are very exacting where their pleasures are concerned; so he sent for Fawn-eyed Fan in hot haste.

When his messenger returned, saying that the *dansruse* refused to come, the landlord broke into a profuse perspiration and a volley of profanity at one and the same time.

If crossed in this whim, Tiger Dick might hold the landlord responsible after the manner of an oriental caliph, who does not hesitate to bowstring an unsuccessful minister.

So Mottle-mugged Mike went himself, to urge the necessities of the case.

He found Fawn-eyed Fan very pale, with a quiet, ladylike reserve and dignity about her that was in marked contrast with her old devil-may-care boldness. He had come prepared to swear at her as "one of his girls," to tell her that "he hadn't put bread into her mouth to have her shake him, just when he was in a tight pinch," etc. When he saw her, he stared at her for one moment, marking the change, and his native wit told him that bluster would be "no go."

He instantly assumed the tone of blarneying servility with which he would have addressed a lady of acknowledged standing, begging her to relieve him of the danger of the road-agent's displeasure.

"I have entered your house for the last time as a dancer, Mr. Dougherty," she said, kindly, yet firmly. "If Tiger Dick insists on seeing me, tell him to come here."

That address—"Mr. Dougherty"—convinced Mottle-mugged Mike, as nothing else could, of the utter hopelessness of trying to shake her resolve; and feeling that the danger of not being "to the fore" when Tiger Dick called for him was greater than that of facing him with the truth, he hastened away, anathematizing all women in one breath, and conjuring the favor and protection of the Virgin in the next.

True to his word, Tiger Dick entered the bar and dancing hall with an easy, confident air.

"Good-evening, gentlemen!" he saluted, smiling upon the gaping crowd. "I am glad to meet so many friends. But let us drink to better acquaintance."

"Ah, ladies! I beg your pardon for my inexcusable oversight. But I assure you that the fair sex never fails to receive my profoundest homage. Landlord, make up for my delinquency by setting before our gentle guests the best you have in the house."

CHAPTER XXXI.

IN THE WOLF'S DEN.

No courtier could have bowed with more polished grace than did this outlaw, as he doffed his hat with a hand as soft and white as a lady's. The women observed this last feature, and yielded their hearts to him, one and all, on the spot.

During the drinking, Mottle-mugged Mike displayed an activity with which he had never before honored the most distinguished guest at Freeze-out Camp, swearing at his attendants behind his hand, and trying to make everything go off smoothly. He wanted to have the road-agent magnate in the best humor, against the moment he should ask for Fawn-eyed Fan.

It came at last.

"But I am to have my dance? Which of these ladies is the famous belle of whom I have heard so much? My dear Dougherty, introduce me with your best grace, or your skin won't hold water to-morrow!"

Then the landlord stood before his facetious guest and said, while he trembled in his shoes:

"Faith, yer honor, jist anny one at all, or the lot, fur the matter o' that, are at yer honor's hond; but, by no fault of my own, Miss Fan is not risent wid us this avenin'."

Now Dick was something of a wag, and understanding the landlord's discomposure, he smiled still more sweetly, and said:—

"You sent for her—of course?"

That slightly emphasized "of course" set Mottle-mugged Mike in a quake.

"Av coorse, yer honor! That did I; an' even wint meself. But she's waitin' on a—on a—sick fri'nd; that's it jist. An' sure, she's not well herself. So av ye'd condescend to excuse—"

"Did you tell her who it was that sued the pleasure of her society?" asked Dick, sweetly.

"Faith, I did, yer honor," replied Mottle-mugged Mike; and forgetting, in his agitation, the line of policy he had marked out for himself, he went on:—

"But she was that onreasonable an' contrary—"

Here he saw that his eagerness to vindicate himself had led him into a mistake; and his jaw dropped.

"If I ever tell 'um what she said, he'll dhrap me on the spot!" was his uncomfortable reflection.

"Ah! What did she say?"

Tiger Dick's clear, piercing eyes held him. It was impossible to lie under them. Not from any scruples on Mike's part; but those eyes would certainly detect a lie ere it had fairly left his lips.

He stammered and grew purple in the face.

"I beg your pardon," smiled the Tiger. "Just what did Miss Fan say?"

"Ye'll not be angered wid me, yer honor," pleaded Mike. "Faith, I did the best I could—"

"Yes. And she said?"

"That if yez wanted to see her, sure ye'd come where she was."

"By Jove!" cried the Tiger. "I'll do it!"

What words will describe the Irishman's relief at the evident good part in which he took the beauty's message!

"But strike up! strike up!" he continued. "I have no doubt one of these fair ladies will prove less chary of her favor."

And, the musicians responding with alacrity to his wishes, Tiger Dick danced with every woman in the room, each in turn. He had the floor to himself, no one presuming to intrude upon the space any more than if he had been royalty itself.

"And now," he said, when he had enjoyed himself to his heart's content, "I have run across a curious document, which may be of interest to some present. Landlord, you have some tacks?"

And having obtained what he required, he fastened against the inside of the dance-hall door a sheriff's proclamation, offering:—

"500 DOLLARS REWARD!

FOR THE APPREHENSION OF

RICHARD LANGLEY,

BETTER KNOWN AS

"TIGER DICK!"

To this was appended another announcement.

"To be married on the 28th inst., in Freeze-out Camp, by the Rev. Giles Goddard, Barbara, daughter of Mr. Jack Musgrave, to Mr. Richard Langley, alias 'Tiger Dick.'"

The 28th was the day following that on which the notice was posted.

"On this happy occasion in my life I shall claim the congratulations of all my friends," said the Tiger. "I cordially invite you all to be present."

Then paying his score, he was about to bow himself out, when the door opened, to give admittance to "Monseer Le Savong."

The little Frenchman was all out of breath with excitement, beaming with smiles and as active as a cricket. In his hurry he had not taken time to remove his little green chemist's apron, nor, indeed, to put on his hat. As he entered the dance-house, he elevated his spectacles to his shining forehead, whose scanty fringe of wiry shining hair round the back was offset by an imposing imperial and mustaches. His twinkling little eyes selected the outlaw at once, and clapping his hands in an ecstasy, he capered forward, crying:

"Ah! Monsieur le Tigair Deek! I have ze pleasure to welcome you to ze hospitality of ze Freeze-out Camp! Ha! ha! ha! I am but now informed of ze—ze—ze huge joke. No?" was his little appended querie as to the correctness of his English.

"Why, my dear doctor!" cried Dick, with cordiality as well as amusement, "this is indeed a pleasure. I feared we had lost you. Do you know, you most wonderful of physicians?—you left us without collecting your fee!"

"Ah! my fine Dick!—duty!—duty to my patient in ze Freeze-out Camp!" replied M. Carrival, shrugging his shoulders with a merry twinkle in his eye. "Bote vat haf ve here? Mari! You? Ah! grace a dieu! So! so! Bet ees to ze demoiselle—ze Amazonian—ze—ze queen-like! Parbleu, mon garcon, you shall make me ze favor. Ah! deny me not!"

"Any favor you wish, my dear doctor."

"Ah! merci—mil merci! I shall haf ze role—ze papa! I shall give away ze bride. No?"

When Dick gladly conceded this the little Frenchman's delight was so great that he with difficulty got away from him. But finally he succeeded, and was gone.

For half an hour this bold outlaw, with no weapons anywhere visible about his person, had mingled with seeming unconcern in a crowd of men, every one of whom was armed to the teeth, and most of whom would gladly have made themselves famous for life by killing the redoubtable Tiger Dick.

The secret of the exploit lay in this: that no one knew what friends he might have in the crowd. Each felt that, before he could cover the reckless dare-devil, some one at his elbow might check his purpose with a bullet.

The last thing the Tiger did was to learn where he could find Fawn-eyed Fan. Let us see how this part of his adventure turned out.

Mottle-mugged Mike's interview with the ex-belle had been held just outside the door of her cabin, that George Bashford, who was dozing, might not be disturbed by the sound of voices. It thus chanced, that it was overheard by one who often loitered near that cabin in the dead hours of the night.

Out of this fact sprung an encounter which promised grave results. As Tiger Dick approached the cabin a man stepped in front of him blocking the way.

In the darkness, neither could see the expression of the other's face; but the voice of the interceptor, though gentle, was firm.

"I beg your pardon, sir. You are on your way to this cabin?"

Thus abruptly challenged, Tiger Dick's wonted suavity failed him, and he demanded with no little asperity:

"What the devil is that to you, sir? And who are you, anyway?"

"Giles Goddard," was the quiet reply.

"Oh! Mr. Goddard? Well, sir, do you know who I am?"

"I think I do. If I mistake not, you are the man called Tiger Dick."

"You are right. And knowing so much, you may have heard that Tiger Dick is not used to being balked in his purposes."

"That is your reputation, I believe, sir."

"Need I inform you of my purpose now?"

"I have been led to understand that you intend to call upon Miss Davenant."

"You are most correctly informed, sir. And now oblige me by stepping out of my path."

"I beg your pardon, sir. With any proper interview I would not interfere; but knowing the spirit in which you are seeking the lady—"

"Well, sir, knowing that spirit?"

"I am here to protect her from insult—with my life, if necessary."

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE MINISTER'S DEFIANCE.

FOR a moment after that bold defiance there was a dead silence.

Men of the truest courage are not the readiest to resort to deadly weapons.

Tiger Dick did not draw a six-shooter in one hand and a twelve-inch blade in the other, and flourish them above his head, as some blustering braggart might have done.

Instead of that he presently said:

"Mr. Goddard, you are a minister of the Gospel, I believe."

"I am, sir."

"May I ask—do you usually go heeled—armed?"

"I do not find it necessary."

"Are you armed now?"

"No."

"And yet you are seeking a quarrel with a man who has the reputation of not taking kindly to dictation or interference of any sort. Besides, one hardly looked for just this sort of thing from one of your profession."

"I seek no quarrel. I am merely interposing to protect a lady. Any man may and should do this."

"Humph! That isn't so badly put. I see that there are always two sides to a question. But, my dear sir, suppose I choose to enforce my will by the use of a deadly weapon, you being unarmed?"

"I shall defend myself to the best of my ability."

"It is only fair to tell you beforehand," said Dick, in cool, measured tones, that would have tried most men's nerves, "that your being armed or unarmed is not my look-out, since you are interfering with me, not I with you—in which case it would be considered cowardly to crowd an unarmed man. Besides this, you ought to know that you stand not the ghost of a show. If I choose to press the trigger on which my finger now rests, I can wound or kill you at my pleasure, without taking my hand out of my pocket, and before you could raise a finger in self-defense."

"That is possible," replied the minister, yet unmoved.

"And do you still persist in your opposition to me?"

"I do."

"In the face of death—certain death?"

"The consideration of life and death should never enter into a question of duty."

There was a grand, deep ring in Giles God-

dard's voice. It was no cold theory of abstract right and wrong that animated him then. All the strong, rich love of his great heart was speaking.

"I shall have given my life for thee!" he was whispering to his hopeless love, deep down in his secret heart. "Even he cannot do more!"

"He" meant George Bashford, his unconscious yet successful rival.

Ah! could he have known what eyes were watching him, what ears were listening to him!

In that moment he thought that he was to die, and she would never know that his life had been sacrificed for her. If she ever remembered him, it would be as a stranger who had been kind to the man she loved! Oh! that was a bitter thought!

But under the shadow of the cabin wall stood a girl with dilated eyes and hands pressed tightly over her heart. She did not move, save an involuntary tremor; she scarcely breathed.

She did not wish to discover herself, if the minister could but succeed in dissuading this bold outlaw from forcing his way to her.

She understood the class of men that Tiger Dick represented. Ah! had her life but been such that she should know less of them! But, knowing them as she did, she was confident that, scorning an unfair advantage, Dick would put himself on the level of his antagonist in a physical encounter. At any rate, some clear, definite warning would be given, before he would shoot down a defenseless man.

In that event, she was prepared to spring forward and save her brave defender's life.

So she waited; and another silence fell between the two men.

It was broken by Tiger Dick.

"This woman for whom you are so ready to sacrifice your life must be very dear to you," he said.

The secret listener started as if this were an entirely new thought to her, and bent forward to catch the reply.

She could not see the quiver that went through the Rev. Giles Goddard's frame like an electric shock, but she heard its vibration in his voice, as he said:—

"That is a subject which can have no interest for you, nor have you any right to intrude upon it."

"That's so, by Jove!" cried Tiger Dick, impulsively. "Look here, Mr. Goddard!—though a minister, and therefore a man of peace, I take it, you are the first man I have met in Freeze-out Camp! Do you suppose any of those blustering fellows that go about like walking arsenals would dare to do what you have done? Not one of them!"

"You may think me a pretty hard case. I've got a bad name, and I dare say I deserve most of it. But I have my good points too, like everybody else. I despise cowardice, and I may come down a little rough now and then on a sneak; but I try to treat a brave man white when I know him."

"Another thing, I want you to believe that my coming to see Miss Davenant to-night would have proved a harmless lark. I don't believe I ever insulted a woman out of pure cussedness—just because she was weak and I strong; certainly never when I was myself. But I yield to your pluck what I wouldn't yield to any two or three well-heeled fighting men. Knowing that she is under your protection, I would not offer the lady a slighting word any more than if she were my sister. And there's my hand on it!"

Now the Rev. Giles Goddard was no yellow-covered hero. He certainly experienced a repugnance to giving his hand to so arrant a rogue as he knew Tiger Dick to be. But he also knew, as do we all, that we clasp hands every day with as sorry knaves as go unchanged. Moreover to anger this knight of the road might turn him from a chivalrous champion (which he was evidently now disposed to be) into a dangerous persecutor of Fawn-eyed Fan. So, taking all things into consideration, the minister compounded with his feelings, as the best of us would have done, and accepted the proffered hand.

"And now," said the Tiger, "I want to ask a favor of you. I tell you frankly that before I knew you I was not disposed to consult your wishes in the matter; and the last thing before coming out here I posted on the door of Fandango Hall a notice of my intended marriage, in which you appeared as the officiating clergyman. I now ask what I proposed to command. You need have no hesitancy in the matter, since the lady—Jack Musgrave's daughter—has known, and I believe loved me, for several years. The marriage is to take place in Fandango Hall, day after to-morrow. Of course I shall have to hold the camp under a sort of martial law, to prevent some of the inconsiderate fellows from interrupting the ceremony with an attempt to capture me—'dead or alive,' as the proclamation has it—with a view to securing the paltry reward."

Tiger Dick laughed lightly as he pictured the situation.

There were distasteful features in it for a re-

spectable minister of the Gospel; but even great scoundrels have to be married, doctored, and buried, much like other people; and somebody must do it. So the Rev. Giles assented as gracefully as he could.

The Tiger then took his leave.

Thereafter the secret watcher saw the minister pace back and forth in the vicinity of the cabin, with his hands clasped at his back and his head bowed. She could not get into the house without attracting his attention, so continued an enforced witness of his emotion.

As if he drew a melancholy pleasure from the very sound of the words, he murmured:

"Dear to me!—very dear to me?"

Then he sighed deeply.

He stopped in his slow walk, lifted his hat and ran his fingers through his hair, shaking his head as if to clear his brain of its brooding clouds. He stood looking fixedly at the door for some moments, until the girl feared that he must discover her; but he did not. Then he turned and disappeared in the night.

More deeply moved than she knew, Fawn-eyed Fan crept into the house. George Bashford was finding nature's balm in quiet sleep. The girl stood looking at him with that absent fixedness with which the Rev. Giles had but now regarded her door.

Would what she learned this night bear fruit of future happiness?

Freeze-out Camp was "red hot!" To have this surprise sprung upon them was a bitter enough pill; to be insolently notified two days in advance was insufferable.

"By all the gods of war, boys," groaned Col. Oglethorpe, from his bunk, "we've got to call that rooster on the next hand, sure! If we don't, blow me if I don't emigrate! The Camp 'll be teetotally played out forever, if he puts that thing through. If only Josh Starkey was hyer!"

The boys were chagrined to that degree that they were ready for anything, if they only had a leader.

When searched for, the Rev. Giles Goddard was not to be found. Anticipating this reaction and that he might be called upon, he had gone out into the mountain solitudes, to escape the necessity of revealing his interview with Tiger Dick, in explanation of why he was deterred from taking an active part in laying plans to entrap the outlaw, by a feeling that it would be treachery after the understanding which existed between them.

It was finally arranged to send to neighboring camps for men and leaders, if the outlaws had not provided against this resort, by blocking the roads to intercept messengers. This plan was carried into effect without hindrance. On the night of the 28th Freeze-out Camp was "cocked and primed," and ready to give the insolent outlaw "a red-hot surprise party."

The scheme was this:—the men (having been run into the camp at night, with all precautions that none save those who were known to be "sound on the goose" should know of their coming) were quartered in saloons near Fandango Hall, leaving that with its usual appearance. The wedding party was to be received here and at a given signal the "army" would sally forth, surround the house, and bag the game.

The night came. A breathless hush brooded over the camp, in spite of the effort to make it wear its usual appearance.

The hours passed—eight, nine, ten, eleven o'clock!

At Fandango Hall, M. Le Savant, arrayed in a swallow-tail coat, with a button-hole bouquet of wild-flowers displayed on the left lapel, and a white necktie which he had that day cajoled one of the fair and frail beauties of the Hall into making for him, paced the floor in a high state of excitement.

The boys had chaffed him into frenzy, by offering outrageous odds that his favorite would fail to "tee the scratch."

With the wildest gestures and a profusion of French oaths, he assured them again and again that "Tigair Deek, ze prence of ze revolvair knew note ze vord fail."

At Billy Cabeen's "dug-out" (Mottle-mugged Mike's contemptuous reference to which in comparison with his more pretentious establishment the reader has doubtless forgotten) there was a party of men almost out of patience waiting for the expected signal. Unluckily they had "cleaned" Billy out early in the evening, so that there was nothing to while the tedium of thus being cooped up.

"I tell ye, Cap," declared an impatient one, "it's no go! He's got wind of the thing, and hedged. Hang it all! for one, I'm as dry as a lime-kiln; and I move that we all sortie, and hunt some place whar thar ain't such a thunderin' drought as has struck this shebang!"

"Thar's music in that," declared another plaintively. "That people only is happy what has reduced irrigation to a science."

At this moment a bird-call sounded without. "Attention, men!" cried their leader. "There goes the signal. He has run into the trap. Now, every man do his duty, and we've got him!"

And eagerly the men sprang to arms.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

TIGER DICK'S WEDDING.

BUT let us return to Fandango Hall, where M. Carrival's faith in "ze fine fellow, Tigair Dick," was rewarded by the appearance of his favorite.

On his arm leaned a lady, whose magnificent beauty had been the talk of Freeze-out Camp ever since that charge which she had defied with such dauntless courage.

How happiness softened the lines of her face. Where she had been terrible, she was now grand. She had the bearing of a young queen going to her coronation.

"Ah, ma'm'selle! need I say I am delight?" cried M. Carrival, bending over her hand and carrying it to his lips with courtier-like grace. "Pardmeet me to be ze first to vish you joy of ze auspicious occasion!"

"*Helas!* Monsieur Tigair Deek, you haf my envy!"

Tiger Dick was radiant with triumph. He looked about on the portentous faces of the miners who filled the hall, smiling his greeting as if he detected nothing amiss.

"Gentlemen friends," he said, "I have to thank you for honoring me with this goodly attendance."

"Ah, Mr. Goddard! I see that you are in readiness. Well, sir, the sooner this is over, the sooner shall I be a perfectly happy man."

The minister saluted gravely.

Mottle-mugged Mike, with the instinctive treachery which lulls suspicion with blarney at the very moment of striking the blow, was fulsome in his cringing servility.

The bridal party was quickly formed. The service had just begun, when the bird-call which signaled the attack was heard from without, low yet distinct.

A shuffling of feet indicated a movement among the crowd in the dancing hall. The men loosened their weapons and exchanged intelligent glances. The women turned pale and began to cower.

"One moment, if you please," said Tiger Dick, pleasantly, staying the minister.

Then turning to the crowd, he went on, with placid smile:—

"Gentlemen, permit me to commend your little game. Nothing, I grant you, could have been more neatly planned, but that you counted upon finding your weasel asleep!"

"Let me tell you what is occurring at this moment, at the various saloons where you have secreted your men. Hearing the signal, they have sprung to arms. But at this moment the muzzles of revolvers are thrust through the six lower panes of every window, and the front and back doors are thrown open from without, showing a line of carbines at the shoulders of men who have already given you a taste of their mettle. Into each front door steps a man who says, politely:—

"Gentlemen, the ceremony is going forward at Fandango Hall; but for the present your attendance is *not* requested. In short, the programme of the evening has been transposed. Instead of your trapping the Tiger so cleverly, he has caged you! However, you have this comfort—he has been impartial in his favors, and every saloon in town is in the same fix with you. But don't let this little change interfere with your amusements."

"This polite address," pursued the Tiger, "rather cools the ardor of your army, proving the efficacy of fair words."

He bows to the gaping audience, and turning again to the minister, with seeming unconcern, says:—

"Pray proceed."

Freeze-out Camp is unquestionably "bluffed." Amid dead silence the ceremony continues, until the minister delivers his solemn adjuration to any who may know cause why these two may not lawfully be joined together, that he now speak or forever hold his peace.

Then there was a sudden rush, a lightning stroke, and a voice crying:

"This to avenge the ill-fated Anselmo del Mornez, betrayed in love and slain by treachery!"

The startled spectators saw Barbara Musgrave sinking into the arms of the man so nearly her husband, while the half-breed, Pedro, his bronze face aflame with passion, stood with reeking poniard held above his head.

The next moment he leaped through a window, carrying away sash and glass with a crash, his face protected with a fold of his scrape, while the room rung with a volley of pistol-shots.

It was a terrible crisis. In an instant every man in the room had drawn his revolver. A wild, promiscuous fight was on the point of breaking out, in which, whatever the result to the rival parties, Tiger Dick must have met his fate, since he is a marked man.

But the cool outlaw was equal to any emergency. Disregarding the assassins he raised his unincumbered hand and shouted:

"Hold, my men!"

That checked all. Who were his men? Evidently those who had shot at the flying murderer. But, as revolvers were instantly in every man's hand, it was impossible to distin-

guish them. They had this advantage: they were organized, and knew friend from foe, while the men from Freeze-out were fighting in the dark. That consideration cowed them once more.

Over Barbara Musgrave's but now triumphant face spread an agony which was not of physical pain, nor the fear of death.

"It is a judgment!" she cried to her heart. "Father, I bartered your mission for the love of this man; and now the punishment of my recreance has fallen upon me!—the cup is snatched from my lips at the very moment of quaffing!"

Then her soul suddenly rebelled.

She turned her eyes to Dick's face, as she rested on his breast, and, with an agony of pleading in her blanched face, whispered:

"Go on! go on! Let me feel that I am your wife before I die!"

But now came the sounds of battle. The leader at Billy Cabeen's "dug-out" was plucky, and hearing the firing at Fandango Hall, and concluding that at one of the saloons the besiegers had been defied, he resolved not to be outdone, and so ordered his men to charge.

Tiger Dick knows that fighting in the street will give renewed courage to the men now held in check by his coolness in Fandango Hall, and a terrible outbreak may be anticipated at any moment. But his blood is up. He looks into Barbara's anguishful eyes. He owes her this much.

"Go on!" he says, sternly, to the minister.

The ceremony proceeds. They are pronounced man and wife.

But at that instant a voice cries:

"Are we dogs, to be rode over like this? Charge!"

A pistol explodes.

Tiger Dick feels a stinging sensation across his cheek.

Then, like the heaving of the sea, rises the revolt!

At that instant the Tiger blows a shrill whistle, and, as if by magic, the lights go out.

In the darkness Pandemonium reigns!

Through doors and windows Fandango Hall seems to disgorge a horde of struggling demons.

The check once gone the uprising has spread like wildfire. Every saloon is now a battle-field.

Out in the street men are riding back and forth on horseback, shooting and shot at.

The shrieks of terrified women, the curses, groans and shouts of struggling men, the tramp and snorting of horses, accompanied by the rattle of small-arms, made night hideous.

But Barbara Musgrave knows nothing of this. The crystal chalice of pure delights so rudely shattered at her very lips, she lies like one dead across Tiger Dick's arm.

Like a beautiful devil, cool when all others are crazed with passion, he fires across the lifeless body of his bride, and so makes his way with her through that maddened throng to the open air.

"Here! Give her to me! The other horse for yourself!"

It is Shadow Jim's voice.

The transfer is quickly made.

Tiger Dick is about to spring upon the back of the other horse, whence he will assume command of his forces and draw them out of that death-trap, when a burly fellow, whom in the darkness he does not recognize, rushes up to him and discharges a pistol directly in his face.

His head enveloped in smoke, the Tiger staggers against his horse, while Boss Kane—for the assassin is none other than he—darts away before he shall be recognized by Shadow Jim.

"Ha! ha!" he mutters, exultantly, "so the Rangers receive a new commander! If she, too, is dead, what matter? I shall hold the field without a rival!"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

HOPELESS CAPTIVITY.

WHEN poor betrayed Nellie Farnsworth awoke again to consciousness she found herself lying just where she had fallen.

When she had collected her faculties, a glance showed her that the blanketed figure still crouched near the fire in the same position in which she had first discovered it.

This did not allay her fears. If it was a woman, even a savage, would she have treated with such heartless neglect a sister woman in the extremity of distress?

Then came another fear. The creature might be dead—a mummy put there to frighten her!

The girl shuddered, and crouching against the rock that barred her escape, watched the motionless figure with dilated eyes, while the fire burnt to embers, and now a flame shot up and illuminated the cavern fitfully, and now it died out and left all in almost total darkness.

But look! Did the figure move at last, or was it only the uncertain light? It seemed to increase in dimensions, looming tall and dark between the terrified girl and the faint glow of the dying fire.

She strained her eyes. She held her breath. She pressed her cold and tremulous hands over her wildly-beating heart, that drummed in her

ears so loud that she could not hear whether there was any sound of footsteps.

Like the vanishing of a shadow the figure disappeared from the dim illumination.

Whither had it gone? Was it real, or only a figment of her imagination, after all? The distracted girl pressed her icy hands to her hot, throbbing temples.

"All this is making me ill!" she murmured. "I am— Oh!"

She could not say *delirious*. Alone, in the bowels of the earth, and haunted by unreal phantoms! Oh, that was too terrible.

But, hark! She thought she heard a sound. It might be approaching her, unseen in the darkness!

She strained her staring eyes around. Away from the dimly glowing embers, nothing was visible save black darkness that seemed to make itself felt. Shuddering, shrinking within herself, she covered her eyes with her hands, and so waited.

The sound of something falling or thrown to the earth made her start and look in the direction whence it came.

A blaze shot up, and by its light she saw that some wood had been thrown upon the embers. As the crackling fire grew stronger, it showed how distinctly a tall figure standing beside it and looking fixedly at the crouching girl.

The small, not unpleasant features, the numerous strings of beads hanging in a broad festoon upon the breast, the short-skirted calico tunic—all proved that it was an Indian woman.

For a long time she gazed steadily and in silence at Nellie; then pointing to the fire, she uttered a single, guttural articulation:—

"Come!"

Although her features did not relax, there seemed to be welcome in her invitation; and, somewhat reassured, Nellie now rose and crept toward her strange companion.

"Skeered? No good! Puh!" were the Indian woman's next utterances, which betrayed the source from which she had learned her scant English.

"You would not harm me?" asked Nellie, raising her eyes in piteous appeal to the other's stony face.

"No sabe!" was the reply, with a shake of the head.

Then, not unkindly:—

"Want eat?"

"No," said Nellie, gratefully. "You are very good. I am not hungry, thank you."

"Drink? Come!" said the Indian, on the point of turning to lead the way.

But Nellie Farnsworth had but one want. Savage or civilized, this was a woman, like herself. Surely she must sympathize with her distress.

Seizing a fold of her blanket with both hands, and fixing her tear-dim eyes upon her with a look that must have moved anything short of Indian stolidism, she pleaded:—

"Oh, you seem kind! Surely you will help me to escape this terrible place. I have friends within a short distance from here. My father, even now, may be in Freeze-out Camp, distressed beyond words over my loss. If you will but take me to them—in thought she coupled another wish with her father—"they will reward you far beyond anything the terrible men who are detaining me can pay you for assisting in their wickedness, and I will bless you to my dying day! You will let me go!"

The Indian woman, half turned away, looked backward over her shoulder at Nellie, the slight knitting of her brows, not in anger nor impatience, but apparently in fixed attention, making her intensely black eyes seem to glitter. There was something so wild in her appearance, her dark face bordered by the gray army blanket, the captive quailed inwardly while she appealed to her.

When Nellie ceased speaking, and evidently waited for a reply, the Indian woman shook her head slowly, and said:

"No sabe. Wait. Little chief come. He chin right smart."

"Oh! what can I say to you?" cried the distracted girl, feeling that the savage must understand her, and pleaded ignorance only as an evasion. "I have been torn from my friends by wicked men. They have no right to hold me here, a prisoner. You are helping them to do a wicked, wicked thing if you refuse to let me escape."

"Oh, you must know what I am trying to tell you!" as the Indian's face still retained its stony impassivity, as if she refrained from interrupting out of politeness, though the words conveyed no meaning to her.

Then, falling into the common error of supposing that those who speak a language brokenly can best understand it when their halting idioms are imitated, she went on earnestly:

"Me prisoner. You let go—vamosé—puckachee. Me give money—gold-dust. Sabe! See! you take this—and this—and this—all yours! Now let go. Me give more—Freeze-out Camp!"

Ah! was ever speech more pathetic! To see the despairing eagerness with which she threw her whole soul into that appeal. Somehow the broken English made it more touching.

As she spoke she stripped her jewelry from her person. It was but little—an unpretentious brooch, simple ear-rings, plain bracelets and one circlet with a garnet setting from her finger. They had fostered an innocent vanity. Now if they would but buy her freedom!

These she almost forced into the hands of her Indian jailer, adding even her little purse, as the readiness with which the barbarian received the gifts kindled hope; and laughing and crying together with hysterical excitement, she clasped her hands and gazed up into the bronze face, urging:

"Oh, you're a dear creature! You will let me go, won't you? And I shall love you always! Come! every moment of delay increases the danger that some one will come and intercept us!"

But the Indian woman did not move, though the captive plucked her blanket and sought to draw her toward the obstructed passage.

Her eyes seemed to flash as they rested on the gold ornaments, but her face did not light with pleasure. Neither did she express thanks by word, look or gesture.

Putting the jewels into some inner receptacle of her clothing, she quietly sat down again in her old place.

The girl stood speechless. Gradually it became plain to her whirling brain that her sacrifice had been useless—the Indian took the trinkets as a free gift.

It was not their value—do not all worldly possessions lose worth in the presence of hopeless captivity?—but this seemed so to emphasize the utter inaccessibility of the savage through pity or by bribery.

"Oh, but you are to let me go!" cried poor Nellie, choking with despair.

"Let 'um go! No good talk," said the Indian, with marked disapprobation in her voice, though no line of her stolid face changed. "Little chief come. Chin him. He say how he mind to. Chicoco no let 'um go, you bet."

Then this forest amazon indicated that the interview wearied her by a very forcible, if not so elegant, protest. She concluded her summary of the situation thus:

"Dry up!"

Then the captive grew desperate.

"But you shall let me go!" she cried, suddenly seizing the squatting savage by both shoulders.

Chicoco manifested not the least disturbance at this unexpected assault.

Rising, she took the girl (now thoroughly frightened at her own temerity) by the arm, led her to the other side of the fire, and set her down on the couch of skins; then returned to her own former position. She had used no violence; but her gripe proved her to be almost as strong as a man.

Thoroughly unnerved, the poor captive bowed her face in her lap, and cried aloud:

"Oh, father! father! why do you not come to me!"

It was the first time she had broken down utterly. Now she had not a shred of hope or courage left.

The Indian woman did not look up any more than if she had not heard that cry of utter despair.

This was the beginning of a hopeless captivity. Days passed, Nellie had no way of noting them. She ate when weakness, rather than hunger, warned her that food was life; she slept when utter exhaustion varied the dull, monotonous agony of wakefulness with the torture of phantom-haunted stupor.

Tears no longer came to her relief. She grew pale and blue-veined, the emaciation refining her beauty; so that during blessed moments of dreamless sleep, she wore a saint-like almost unearthly loveliness.

When awake, she thought of her father, and of—that other! He must have been killed, she came to believe, in that assault upon the road-agent lieutenant in her defense. When in her dreams, on one or two occasions, he smiled upon her with a heavenly radiance on his face, she longed to dream again!

So, until the time came when the firelight, passing through the interstice between the barrier of rock and the top of the passage, fell upon a face! It was a strange face—not at all prepossessing—almost hidden by a bushy beard and frowsy hair. The eyes were bloodshot; the nose a rum-blossom in a high state of cultivation. Above was a shabby military cap with a sadly-battered visor; below a blue army overcoat.

When the prisoner chanced to detect this face, there was a look of wondering curiosity in the bleared old eyes as they roved about the interior of the cave.

Instantly she recalled one of the passengers in the coach! Was it help at last! Were her friends come for her!

"Help! help! oh, help!" she shrieked, springing toward the barrier. "I am a prisoner here! Help! Father! Father! FATHER!"

The face of the old hummer had vanished on the first note of her voice, musical even in her distress.

Nellie turned and faced her Indian jailer with the wild look of a timid animal driven to bay.

The Indian woman, who had seen her thus start from her sleep, now evidently thought that her brain was quite turned. After a silent scrutiny for a few moments, during which the set look on her captive's face did not change, she got up, put a pot of water over the fire, and threw some herbs in it. Then she squatted again, with her eyes on the fire, as one who waits in phlegmatic endurance the passage of time.

Nellie waited. Crying out would avail nothing further. If he was a friend, he knew of her pitiable plight; if an enemy, it was useless to appeal to him.

She waited! waited! waited! until dead despair paralyzed hope. Then she sunk forward on her face, on the sandy bottom of the cavern!

That face was as a sail, that rises above the distant horizon, to sink again from the longing gaze of the shipwrecked mariner.

Perhaps it was but of her imagination, after all.

Presently the Indian woman came and raised her up, and led her to her couch. She yielded with the docility of a child—nay, of the paralysis of the will. When a tin cup was placed in her hand, she drank its contents, not questioning what it might be, not heeding what she was doing.

But the intense bitterness of the draught roused her. What had she drunk?

"Good!" said the Indian woman, in answer to her startled look.

Soon she felt an irresistible drowsiness creeping over her. She had been dragged! Of this she had had a nameless horror from the first—not the fear of being poisoned, but the utter helplessness when the senses are locked in narcotic chains. Now indeed was she utterly at the mercy of her terrible enemy!

She struggled frantically to rise. Her limbs might as well have been of stone!

She tried to shriek her terror, to cry out for mercy. Her tongue was lead; her voice died in an inarticulate murmur!

Then came oblivion!

Through the corridor from the outer world came a signal.

The Indian woman started as if electrified, and answered it.

The helpless captive heard it not!

Then from the passage came the sound of approaching footsteps.

Now, God defend the innocent!

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE SLEEPING BEAUTY.

BUT Tiger Dick's star of destiny was not yet set. He was half stunned and blinded by the treacherous shot of the robber-lieutenant, but not wounded in the least degree.

A moment later he was in the saddle; and by his address his men were drawn out of the fight, having much more than balanced the account of their losses.

Barbara Musgrave's wound proved to be more painful than dangerous. Making a terrible gash in her bosom, the assassin's knife had encountered a rib, and so glanced off. Tiger Dick himself ventured into Freeze-out Camp on the following night to get Monsieur Le Savant to dress the wound.

The Frenchman would have gone anywhere and done anything to please "ze fine fellow, Tigair Deek," so he once more submitted to be blindfolded.

The yearning love with which Barbara clung to her husband was worthy of a far better woman; and Dick, not forgetful of her devotion to him, was faithful in his attendance upon her.

But the time came when he stood face to face with Shadow Jim, their interview safe from observation. It was the first time they had been alone together.

Ah! if sorely tried Barbara could have known now that a more subtle danger was about to assail her happiness!

"And is this really you, Jim?" asked the Tiger.

"The same, me noble juke!" replied the "shadow," in the old swaggering way which distinguished him during his early association with the Tiger.

"Why have you not given me an opportunity to see you before this? Why did you wish it to appear that we were strangers? I saw it in your eyes at our first meeting."

"You haven't a nip?" asked Jim. "At school I never could do sums in dry measure."

Taking the hint, and knowing his man so well, the Tiger passed his flask without a word.

"May you never see the bottom of it!" said the "shadow," and inverted the flask over his mouth.

There was a long silence, in which he stood with closed eyes, as if lost in the ecstasy of that draught. Then with a sigh of satisfaction he returned the now empty flask to its owner, and said:

"Answering your last question first, I thought I might be of more service to you, if it was not suspected that we had sucked heaven through the same nozzle in the past. Rare old times those, my boy. Don't treasure it up against me that I sloped when I found that they had

you dead to rights, and all was lost save honor.

"Answering your first question last, I haven't before seen an opening that would appear to have made itself."

"You were always a cautious one, Jim."

"An ounce of prevention, you know. But, prince, you'll see that I haven't forgotten your highness's interests. Was there ever such a liegeman as I?"

"Never! But what now?"

"It's rather soon after your late felicity to broach the matter," said Shadow Jim, with a light laugh. "But if you're your old self, it won't turn your stomach, nor make your blood run cold!"

"But what is it, my dear Jim?"

"All in good time, me noble juke. When you can spare a few hours from your billing and cooing, I will open up my little surprise party. Don't hurry yourself, however; it will keep."

And though this air of mystery piqued Tiger Dick's curiosity, he could get nothing further out of his friend.

On the following day he put himself at the disposal of Shadow Jim, and together they rode forth.

Before the mouth of the cave to which we have seen Nellie Farnsworth conducted Jim stopped and made a signal. It was answered from within.

"Wait a moment," he said, and disappeared.

Consumed with curiosity, Tiger Dick waited until his friend reappeared.

"Now go in," said Jim, with a curious smile on his face.

Without further question, the Tiger entered the black mouth of the cave.

Groping in the darkness, he soon came in contact with what appeared to be a blanket, suspended as a curtain across the passage.

Lifting this, he beheld beyond a sight which riveted him to the spot with astonishment and delight.

The subterranean chamber was brilliantly lighted by a fire that burned in the center. Near this was a couch of skins, whereon reclined as fair a vision of feminine loveliness as Tiger Dick had ever beheld.

Fascinated, the Tiger crept forward on tiptoe and gazed down upon the sleeping beauty.

Ah! already he had forgotten that other who lived but in her love for him!

Instead of marrying Nellie Farnsworth's beauty, pallor and emaciation made it more saintlike. Nothing could have been in sharper contrast to Barbara's Amazonian splendor.

Tiger Dick admired the bandit queen; but this frail flower affected him differently. He longed to win her love—to take her within the shelter of his arms and shield her from every sorrow.

From the darkened corridor Shadow Jim watched his principal. He saw him kneel beside the couch and touch his lips to the slender, blue-veined hand.

"Struck below the belt!" he mused, with a not pleasant chuckle. "Hang my tenderness of heart! But for that I should be in his place."

Kneeling beside the couch, Tiger Dick gazed long and fixedly at the sleeping beauty, drinking in such draughts of subtle intoxication as must prove fatal to Barbara Musgrave's supremacy over his fickle fancy.

At last he tore his eyes away, with a long-drawn sigh.

Shadow Jim stood beside him.

"Well, me noble juke?"

"Jim, you have blessed me and damned me at the same time."

"Eh?"

"I never dreamed, until now, what it was to be supremely happy!"

"H'm!"

"I never dreamed, until now, of the possibilities of utter wretchedness!"

"The deuce!"

"Jim, I shall never know another hour's peace!"

"A gloomy prophecy, prince."

"This thing will end in the death of this girl, of Barbara, of myself, or of all three of us!"

"And I shall be responsible for it all! I hoped to serve you better than that."

"I don't blame you. We must all walk in the line of our destiny!"

A sullen gloom overcast Tiger Dick's countenance. The gambler's superstition was upon him.

He got up and left the cavern. In the outer air he seemed to breathe more freely.

In a few words he learned Shadow Jim's arrangements for Nellie's detention. Then came the story of Barbara's treachery.

"Ah!" said Dick, with a peculiar look in his eyes, "she removed her from the chance of being discovered by me?"

"By an intuitive knowledge of your character, me boy!" laughed Jim.

Tiger Dick made no reply; but in that moment he conceived a feeling of resentment toward his wife, who would have deprived him of the opportunity ever to have seen Nellie Farnsworth.

The following day saw his second visit to the cave.

Nellie was now conscious.

On his appearance, the Indian duenna turned to retire.

"Oh! do not leave me!" cried the terrified girl, clinging to her.

"My child, do not fear me," said the Tiger, gravely. "I would not harm you for my life. To prove to you my desire to spare you all distress, the woman shall remain."

At a sign from Tiger Dick, Chicoco resumed her squatting posture, and seemed to become oblivious to all that surrounded her.

With fearful questioning in her eyes Nellie Farnsworth gazed at the Tiger.

"Oh! if you wish to befriend me," she said, "release me from this terrible captivity! I have friends within a few hours' ride, if only word could be got to them."

"I must ask you to believe in the real friendliness of my intentions toward you," said the Tiger, assuming his most ingratiating manner, "even though I deny your request. For reasons which I cannot now explain, yet the wisdom of which I hope to be able to prove to you as soon as the seal of silence is removed from my lips, it is necessary to impose this severe trial upon you. Need I say how painful it is for me to appear to you in the light of an enemy?"

"That resort should be had to so desperate a measure as the employment of a road-agent band to effect your capture, must prepare you to believe that grave interests, of which you have no knowledge, are involved in your life. In my struggle against the power that is inimical to you—for it is I that effected your rescue through the aid of a government detective—I am compelled to observe the utmost secrecy until I can consult with your father—"

"My father?" cried Nellie, catching at the word. "Oh! what do you know of him? Is not he in Freeze-out Camp?—perhaps mourning my loss!"

"He has not yet arrived, though I have reliable information that he is on his way westward with a prisoner," said the Tiger, unblushingly. "Until his coming, I will, with your permission, call upon you every day, and seek to lighten the loneliness of your imprisonment."

The girl gazed at the stranger who came to her with this mysterious tale. Could she believe him? His speech was plausible. But her life had never held a trace of mystery before. What was the meaning of the doubt and uncertainty that suddenly seemed to pervade the very air she breathed?

"Who are you?" she asked, abruptly.

Tiger Dick hesitated. Then, as if half communicating with himself, he said:—

"I see no reason why I should withhold my name from you. It is Arthur Chudley."

"Oh! I have heard my father speak of him!" exclaimed Nellie.

"Have you, indeed?" asked Tiger Dick, with the most natural air in the world. "Then that must give you confidence. I assure you that no one holds a higher place in my esteem than your father and my friend."

This was the beginning of Tiger Dick's visits. They were renewed daily. His manner was so gently deferential that Nellie gradually lost her fear of him. Indeed, she began to look eagerly forward to his coming as a break in the dull monotony of her imprisonment.

As she came to trust him, her glad, though wan smile of greeting, and the touch of her soft hand, fed the wild passion he had conceived for her, like oil upon flames, until one day he lost self-mastery, and, sinking upon his knees before her, covered her hands with kisses.

With a cry of affright the girl sought to snatch her hands away and escape him.

The mask was now torn aside. Tiger Dick could no longer control his consuming passion.

"No! no! listen to me!" he cried. "Is it strange that, seeing you every day in your loveliness and distress, I have learned to love you?—that I should long to snatch you from all perils and bear you away to peace and happiness? Oh, my darling! you may trust this heart that never awakened to love save beneath your smile."

"Ah! how I have startled you, my timid love!"—for the girl was speechless with terror. Something very near the truth came to her all in a flash. He was holding her a prisoner while he sought to win her love. If he failed to win her by fair means, then—

Her heart contracted with an icy spasm as she sought to escape the possible alternative.

"Nay, do not shrink from me!—do not tremble so! Have I not shown you that my love is your protection? Listen to me! I love you! How could I harm you? My darling! yield me your heart. A word!—a kiss!—it will tell me all!"

"Release me! I do not—cannot love you!" gasped Nellie.

"Release you!" cried the Tiger; and the thought seemed to goad him to sort of frenzy. "Never! never! while life lasts!"

And suddenly he caught her in his arms and covered her face with kisses.

Before poor Nellie could voice the terror that rent her soul, the cavern resounded with a shriek of rage and despair that thrilled Tiger Dick to the very marrow of his bones.

Then came the rush of feet along the corridor. Releasing the victim of his love, he turned with drawn revolver, at bay!

He stood face to face with his injured wife.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE HALF-BREED'S HATE.

It is no part of our story to detail the ordinary operations of the road-agent band. The reader will understand that they flowed along much as usual, depredations being made, as opportunity offered, over wide extent of country by detached parties, and the heart drama which we are narrating being interwoven with, rather than superceding them.

Thus Tiger Dick was held to no account for his movements by his bride after the first few days, when his close attendance made her forget the pain of her wound; and a daily absence of several hours called for no explanation.

Indeed, longing to taste the delights of domestic seclusion, Barbara had a cabin erected at some little distance from the general camp, and in this retreat sequestered herself entirely from the cares and interests of the bandit organization.

Here she reveled in her love. When Dick was with her, she lived in his smiles; when he was away, she dreamed of him, and busied herself with devising a thousand little surprises against his return, to show that he was ever in her thoughts. In the genial sunshine of this new-found happiness she grew more beautiful day by day, developing soft, womanly charms that the asperities of her earlier life had blighted in the bud.

Then into this Eden came the serpent, in the person of Boss Kane. His malice never slept. But let us see how, defeated in the attempt at assassination, it found opportunity to strike a subtler blow.

To no purpose does the Indian cling so tenaciously as to that of revenge. Having failed to keep his pledge to his sacrificed "pardonner," Pedro the half-breed felt as if, waking or sleeping, he were constantly pursued with reproaches by the dead. To appease this haunting wraith, then, became the sole aim of his life. When his betrayers had paid the penalty of their blood, then would Anselmo del Mornez rest in his dishonored grave.

To guard his own life until his mission was accomplished, imposed caution. So the half-breed, impetuous by nature, restrained the impulse to penetrate into the very camp of the outlaws and strike another blow at their queen, and resorted to craft. He must wait and watch. For days, even weeks, he lived in the wilderness, slinking from covert to covert like a beast of prey, while Barbara, happy in her home, cared not to wander beyond the limits of the little glen which constituted the robbers' stronghold.

But Sleepy Jake, having no sweet dalliance to detain him, went in and out like the rest; and him, apart from his fellows, the Spano-Indian one day intercepted in the wild mountain solitude.

"Stop! Draw not thy weapon. Prepare for death!" commanded the half-breed, his boyish voice vibrating with a depth of passion that showed him to be a stern, implacable man in spirit.

His revolver covered the heart of the Sleepy Jake. The latter, never quick in movement, knew that Tiger Dick himself could have made no successful resistance in his situation.

"What have you ag'in' me?" he demanded, in that sullen ferocity with which a dull, phlegmatic brain meets inevitable death.

His eyes, growing wider and wider, as the livid hue of mortal fear deepened in his face almost to a lead color, were fixed, glaring upon the muzzle of the weapon that menaced him, as if he waited to see death stalk forth from one of those black chambers.

"I never done nothin' to you," he went on, in a husky growl.

"See the blood of my more than brother that is dripping from thy hand!" cried the half-breed, pointing with his left hand, while his burning glance followed with such fierce intensity that Sleepy Jake mistook his figurative meaning, and starting with horror, gazed at his own hand, as if expecting to see blood upon it.

"Ah, carajo! Why do I wait?" cried the half-breed, carried away by the tide of his passion. "Each living breath of thine is a throb of pain to him! 'Slay! slay!' he cries to my soul, eager for this too-long delayed revenge. Ah, my brother! I hasten to give thee that little taste of joy! Look you!—he comes!"

"Then die, thou traitor!"

Having wrought himself almost to the point of insanity with passion, Pedro sprang forward in the very act of firing.

A pebble turning under his foot deflected his aim, and threw him so that he fell upon one knee.

A cool man in Sleepy Jake's place might here have drawn his revolver and dispatched his enemy before he could recover from this mischance. But abject fear of death had brought out the innate brutality of the road-agent's nature. A craze of blind animal rage seized him, and, forgetting all conventional instruments of warfare, he sprang forward with a savage, bestial

howl, to rend with his hands the foe that had menaced his life.

He was much stronger and heavier than his youthful antagonist, but the half-breed was as quick and lithe as an eel; besides his intense nature was like dynamite.

When, therefore, Pedro felt the gripe of his burly adversary fasten upon him like steel clamps, the thought that his life might be frittered away on this mere tool while the real perpetrator of that base treachery escaped, seemed to set his very soul on fire!

With eyes that blazed living flame, and clinched teeth through which the foam flew as he gasped for breath, he twisted and turned and writhed with a lightning activity almost superhuman.

The battle-ground was near the verge of a precipice. Pedro bent all his fiery energies to dragging and rolling his enemy to the brink and hurling him over. Sleepy Jake's only hope was to crush his active foe before they reached that point.

But he was tripped and thrown, rolled over and over, and hustled this way and that so rapidly that, half stunned by numerous blows on the head, and choked and blinded with dirt, he lost all notion of his bearings, and could not tell when he was approaching and when receding from the fatal precipice; while, though he could grasp him with his hands, he could not get and keep the squirming half-breed within his arms.

So the end came, and fiery activity conquered cold, brute strength. The combatants went over the verge together—one to hurtle down through that awful space, end over end, and strike the rocks with a dull, sickening thud; one to save himself from immediate annihilation by throwing his arm about a projecting root, and so clinging, pale with a dull yellowish-gray ghastliness, gasping for breath, and so exhausted that he could not draw himself up to safety.

Then as he looked upward, his dim eyes distinguished the face of a new foe bending from above.

The owner of the face was Boss Kane!

"I allow you've been havin' some lively fun, my Christian friend," he observed, lanterningly.

Pedro the half-breed could not retort. Despair was in his eyes. It was all up. His mission was doomed never to see its fulfillment. He would soon meet the questioning from his soul-brother with the word that he had failed!

Boss Kane, with the coarse brutality of one who loved brutality for its own sake, quietly sat down, crossing his legs in an attitude of ease, and drew out his watch.

"Pardon me," he said, "I'll bet you two to one that you drop inside o' two minutes an' fifteen seconds! Don't trouble yerself to let go yer holt, to git out the stakes. Ef I win, I'll foller ye down *thar* an' help myself out o' yer pockets. Ef you win, then I'll hold the stakes in safe keepin' fur ye ontel ye call fur 'em! Hal! hal! hal! By glory! it ain't every rule that works both ways as handsome as that, now I kin tell ye!"

"A word, my friend!" gasped the half-breed.

"I will buy my life—"

"Beg pardon, boss! I ain't sellin'."

"By telling you that which will enable you to crush your enemy—"

"Eh?"

"Tiger Dick!"

"By —!"

Boss Kane sprung to his feet with sudden pallor, his careless air giving place to a look of unmistakable terror.

Seizing a rock, he raised it above his head in both hands, as if to dash it into the face of the helpless half-breed.

"Curse you!" he hissed; "you know that? Dare to breathe—"

"Hold! you hate him. I have seen it. I saw you try to kill him, that night in the darkness. But—"

"And you shall die now for your knowledge!" cried the robber lieutenant, grinning like a fiend in his fear.

"Wait! Do I hate you for that? Am I therefore your foe? *Caramba!* we are friends—allies! You would destroy him? Look you! I will give you the means!"

"Ah!" cried Boss Kane, as the idea at last penetrated his dull brain.

Then, after a moment's thought, he reached down and drew Pedro to a place of safety.

The half-breed sunk down, too utterly exhausted to stand.

Boss Kane eyed him suspiciously, keeping his weapons in readiness.

"No 'possum games on me," he reflected, "they won't work."

Pedro lay all in a heap, gasping, with his eyes closed.

"Well," said the road-agent lieutenant, somewhat roughly, "what have ye got to say?"

The half-breed opened his eyes languidly.

"Give me to drink," he said.

Boss Kane complied, then waited.

"You hate the new commander," he began presently, rousing himself.

"You said that before," growled Boss Kane, ungraciously.

"True. But listen yet a little. His power rests upon the recommendation of Senora Barbara, as hers sprung from that of the Senor Jacques, her father."

"Well?"

"Suppose there are sown between them the seeds of discord? Suppose her hatred of him may be made to exceed the love she now bears him? Suppose it can be proved that he is the basest of traitors to her confidence?"

"Hah!" ejaculated Boss Kane, seeming to take fire from the Spano-Indian's intense manner.

"Suppose," pursued Pedro, "that she should be made to discover that he has wounded her in a point that a woman like her never forgives? Suppose all were arranged so that in the first moment of passion she should find ready to her hand the means of crushing him?"

"Speak! speak!" cried the now thoroughly-aroused bandit. "What have you found out? What do you know?"

"That within the first half honeymoon he is false to her!" cried the half-breed.

Boss Kane concentrated his astonishment and demoniac exultation in a round oath.

"But how can that be?" he cried, presently, his suspicious nature warning him not to yield too ready a credulity.

"Come!" cried the half-breed, his hatred aiding him, even more than the stimulant he had taken, to recover his strength. "You shall see with your own eyes!"

Some hours later these two crept into the cave in which Nellie Farnsworth was imprisoned. When they came forth Boss Kane's face wore an expression of savage exultation that the Demon might have envied.

"Now," he chuckled, "I have him!"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

DILAPIDATED DAN IN PERIL.

FREEZE-OUT CAMP was humiliated. It had been beaten at its own game.

Sore with defeat, it is not surprising that re-creation sprung up among the leaders from the various camps that had contributed to the "army." Each blamed the others for mismanagement, with, in some cases, a broad intimation of cowardice.

The result was several impromptu duels, which threatened to involve the whole Camp in domestic war.

In the midst of hot dissension a placard was discovered, posted by no one knew whom, warning the allies to disperse, on pain of having their respective camps "cleaned out" by the road-agents, and signed "Tiger Dick."

This hint was acted upon, and each party went its way, leaving Freeze-out Camp to its own devices, though all declared loudly and with much blustering profanity that it was the "snide" treatment they had received by their supposed friends, and not Tiger Dick's threat, that influenced them.

Col. Oglethorpe groaned and swore, and longed for the recovery of his own strength, or the return of his friend, Josh Starkey.

Time passed. The wounded men were convalescing rapidly.

George Bashford chafed incessantly at the enforced inactivity. He was ready for almost any imprudence, in spite of M. Carrival's positive prohibition of excitement or exposure, but that in the existing state of depressed public sentiment he could not have found men to follow him.

But what lover, especially with a sympathetic woman in attendance upon him, could restrain the impulse to confide to her kindly ear all the despair that gnawed at his heart-strings?

Ah! how the faithful heart of Fawn-eyed Fan was wrung while he, with a man's obtuseness to the anguish that blanched her cheeks, though it could not wring a cry from her locked lips, rung the changes on the charms of her he loved!

She listened to his rhapsodies over her rival, and yielded sympathetic replies, when the words seemed as if they would choke her.

But when he expressed his gratitude for her "sisterly care"—that was what he called it—then she could scarcely restrain the tears that must have told him all.

In the presence of the Rev. Giles Goddard—and he was with her much of the time, aiding her care for George with unabated solicitude—her manner had undergone a puzzling change. She seldom met his glance; and when the strong though hopeless love to which he had now yielded up his whole soul vibrated in his deep, sad tones, a blush would mantle her cheek, from chin to temple.

There were times when this sign of agitation shook his soul with a tempest of warring passion; and it seemed as if he must crush her in his arms, and pour over her in a rushing flood the lava of his love. But he saw the look that came into her eyes whenever George spoke to her or touched her hand; and that taught him his madness.

Thus matters stood when one day the Camp was roused to renewed warlike ardor by the return of Josh Starkey.

"Joe, old man!" he cried, as he wrung Col.

Oglethorpe's hand, "this hyar's the blamedest, orneriest, cussedest go! I swar! when I heard it, I jist stuck my tail between my legs an' howled!—I did, by gracious. Then I jist dropped everythin' on the dump an' streaked it fur Freeze-out, like a son-of-a-gun, never stoppin' to breathe nor fodder!"

"An' now, Joe, my boy, this hyar won't do. As I come through Bullion City an' Fiddler's Bend, they was 'crowin' over us, an' I hadn't the gall to say a deggoned word! Joe, ef you'll believe me, I heard a flannel-mouthed wind-bag— But, *thar!*—I never opened my peep!"

And too much humiliated to even complete his climax, Josh Starkey ceased with a solemn shake of the head.

He soon acquainted himself with the situation, and at once set out to "drum up" recruits for a grand raid on the public enemy and the rescue of Jim Farnsworth's daughter.

On the following day the Camp was thrown into a fever of excitement by what was at first supposed to be the return of Josh Starkey and his men. The crags echoed and re-echoed with a cry which to a son of the West needs no interpretation:—

"Oh, yes! Oh, yes! O o oh, ye e-es!"

It galvanized into unwonted life the loungers in the saloons, and brought them out into the street, to see what new excitement was in prospect. It stopped the labors of those brawny fellows who were winning from mother earth by the sweat of their brows the wherewithal for a night's carousal, and sent them pouring into Camp.

Up the mountain road appeared two men dragging a third between them. The captives were a couple of "pards" who had gone out "prospectin'"; the captive was none other than our eccentric friend Dilapidated Dan.

Ever since the repulse before Barbara Musgrave's cabin, public sentiment had set strong against Dilapidated Dan. It was the current belief that, having diverted the Vigilantes by sending them after Lanky Luke and his bound, this cunning disciple of Bacchus had slipped away and brought the road-agent band down upon the men of Freeze-out.

Both loud and deep, then, were the curses, and black the frowns with which he was now greeted; to which he opposed only a look of piteous appeal, while his rickety old frame, violently shaken from time to time by a drunken hiccup, pleaded his utter helplessness.

"Whar'd ye tree the blarsted pole-cat!" was the demand, to which the prospectors replied:

"Ketched him sneakin' round up yonder, git-
tin' p'int for them infernal road-agents."

"Hang the — spy!" shouted one, to whom the crowd yielded a hearty indorsement.

"He's a mighty poor specimen, an' that's a fact. But I reckon he'll dance as light as a better man."

"That's all right, gentlemen (hic!)—that's all right!" hiccupped the old bummer, with the piteous cadence of an inebriate.

But his voice was drowned in a general burst of execration, and he was hustled roughly forward.

"Hyar's a rope what belonged to Terry Luddington himself," shouted an impromptu hangman. "I allow it's fittin' to hang the galoot what fetched the road-agents to give Terry his last dose."

"That's the ticket!"

"Pass 'er along, boys!"

"Up he goes!"

The crowd was so taken with the poetical justice of thus avenging Terry's death that they were ready to hang the alleged spy out of hand.

While several were busy getting one end over the limb of a cottonwood that grew in front of Pandango Hall, a miner skilled in that art was putting a running noose in the other.

"Hold on, boys. Ye would (hic!) n't hurt the ole man?" whined Dilapidated Dan.

One, touched by the piteous glances which the old wreck cast about upon the crowd, said:

"Give him a show, gents. Every man's entitled to that."

"I allow he's had too thunderin' much show already," objected Terry Luddington's friend. "What more d'ye want? He brung the road-agents down onto us, when but fur him we'd 'a' bagged Tiger Dick. That 'ud 'a' saved his rubbin' our noses in the dirt this last time, an' we'd 'a' had some mighty good men on deck now, instead o' six foot under ground—hey, boys?"

A savage groan responded to this appeal.

Dilapidated Dan seemed incapable of entering a defense. His brain, fuddled by long drink, always failed him in an emergency.

"A victim of adverse circumstances," he began, weakly; but nobody heeded him. Then, shaking his head despondently, he went on, to himself:

"It's o' no use. They'd tackle my veracity—that's what they'd do. No use—no use!"

"Cl'ar the track!" yelled a voice; and *bump! bump! bump!* came a box, being rolled beneath the tree.

"Hyar's the drop!"

"Mount him, boys!"

"Up he goes!"

And the cringing victim was lifted upon the impromptu scaffold.

"Go it easy, boys! Don't be hard on the ole man!" he pleaded.

Then, his mind seeming to wander, and the force of habit asserting itself in that supreme moment, he went on:—

"Stern man frowns upon my honorable scars and battle-worn uniform; lovely woman withholds her smiles from the vanquished veteran in the battle of life! But my *veracity*—that's all right, boys—that's all right!"

But already the noose was about his neck; and Terry Luddington's friend, after having adjusted it, had leaped off the box, crying to those who held the other end of the rope:—

"Ready to walk away, gents!"

Then, far above the whimpering and weak appeals of the tearful women who huddled about the door of Fandango Hall, rose a shrill shriek.

The next instant a woman shot meteor-like through the crowd, leaped upon the box, and threw the noose off the neck of the victim of Lynch law.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

FAWN-EYED FAN TO THE RESCUE.

NEVER had Fawn-eyed Fan appeared so fascinatingly beautiful as when, her hair streaming, her eyes ablaze, she faced the throng.

"Stop!" she cried. "What are you about to do? Do you know who this is?"

But the old bummer had sunk all in a heap at her feet, covering his face with his hands as if to shut out some terrible vision, and crying:—

"Give me the send-off, boys; but don't, *don't*, don't let her touch me!"

"He's a—spy!—that's who he is!" shouted Terry Luddington's friend in response to Fawn-eyed Fan's question.

But the girl, struck by the fear of the old man, no longer heeded the crowd, but bent over him, and asked:—

"Why should I not touch you? Did I ever harm you?"

"Don't! Don't!" was all the old bummer replied.

"Ye'll have to stand aside, Miss Fan," interposed one of the men, respectfully, yet firmly. "It's fur men to handle such as him."

She looked up with quick terror.

"Ned, you won't turn against us?" she cried, seizing the hand with which he was about to assist her off the box. "You won't let them hurt him?"

The man shook his head.

"You women folks is all tender-hearted," he said. "But the boys won't stand talkin' hyar. Thar's been amany good men rubbed out, all on account o' his spyin'."

Then the girl threw her arms about the cowering old wreck, and facing them all, she cried:—

"You sha'n't touch him! You'll kill me first! He's my father, and I'll die right here, before harm shall come to him!"

The men started aghast at this announcement. Before they recovered, Fawn-eyed Fan discovered a man, hurrying to the scene; and springing to her feet, she cried:—

"Mr. Goddard! Mr. Goddard! Oh, help! They're going to kill my father!"

The minister shouldered his way through the crowd, the men respectfully making way for him.

In her eagerness the girl seized him by one shoulder, while her other arm clung round Dilapidated Dan.

"Oh, you can save him!" she cried. "He is my father! Don't let them harm him! I'm sure he's not the spy they say he is!"

The Rev. Giles Goddard was deeply moved beneath the touch of that slender, tremulous hand. He stood perfectly still, lest he should hasten its removal.

"Gentlemen," he said gravely, "has this man had a fair trial?"

"We know he's guilty; an' I reckon that's enough," urged Terry Luddington's would-be avenger, somewhat sullenly.

The crowd was clearly with him in sentiment.

"Whar's the use o' wastin' time on a spy?" was heartily indorsed.

"If he is the spy he is supposed to be," replied the minister, "no harm can come of the delay which will give him a fair trial and a chance to prove his innocence. Besides, Judge Starkey will return to night, and if the prisoner is in collusion with the road-agents, he may be able to turn his knowledge to account."

The men were not won from their vengeful purpose all at once; but by dint of personal appeals added to general moderate counsel, the Rev. Giles succeeded in creating a party in favor of delay and proceeding with some little legal formality.

Fawn-eyed Fan was very shy in the expression of her gratitude.

"I shall never forget your kindness," she said, brokenly, avoiding his glance.

But, having promised to be responsible for the prisoner, the Rev. Giles took one side, while Fan took the other, and so between them they helped the broken old man to Fan's cabin.

He was found to be very weak from insufficiency of food, and utterly prostrated by the

excitement through which he had just passed—apparently more on account of his meeting with Fan, than because of the jeopardy of life. He shrunk weakly from her touch, and could not bear to look at her.

Giles Goddard saw that there was some family mystery here which he did not seek to penetrate.

The discovery of her father in such a wreck, instead of exciting repugnance toward the daughter, filled the minister with a profound pity for her—was an excuse for her faults. Her love for the old man, with whom most would have been humiliated to claim relationship, showed how true-hearted she was.

Giles Goddard was no fanatic. He knew that the first need of the old man was liquor, and gave it to him. Then he left him, much revived, with his daughter.

"Why do you shrink from me, father?" asked Fan, when they were alone.

"Don't! don't!" pleaded the old bummer. "She looks at me out of your eyes—speaks to me in your tones! My God! shall I *never* be free? She has haunted me day and night! But don't believe I meant to kill her! I wasn't myself; and finding her with him just then, it crazed me, and I struck before I knew!"

"But, father, you have made a mistake. You did not kill mother."

"What! not dead?" asked Dilapidated Dan, lifting his bowed head, and clasping his daughter's hand in both of his, in his eagerness.

"No, she is alive."

"But where? Not here with you?"

"No—no," replied Fan, and now her head dropped, and her cheek flamed scarlet.

"Where then?" persisted the old man.

"She is gone!"

"With him?"

Fawn-eyed Fan nodded silently.

The old man let his head fall upon his breast, and silence reigned.

Presently Fawn-eyed Fan's hand stole into his. It was as if she said:

"At least, we are left to each other!"

He clasped it close, though tremulously.

A tear fell upon it.

The girl started up nervously.

Hurriedly, as if to divert him from this mood, she said:

"Tell me—you are not of these road-agents?"

"No," replied Dilapidated Dan.

"Then what had you to do with bringing them upon Col. Oglethorpe's party?"

"Nothing whatever."

"Why did you leave him so mysteriously?"

"I saw that young Bashford suspected me. I was afraid I should be brought here, where I might meet you. I dared not meet you; and yet I seemed fascinated, so that I could not leave the vicinity."

"And so you were found lurking about?"

"No. I was coming into camp."

"To see me?"

"No. To give information as to the whereabouts of Jim Farnsworth's daughter."

"Of whom?" gasped Fawn-eyed Fan breathlessly.

"Jim Farnsworth's daughter," repeated Dilapidated Dan. "I was with her in the coach when she was abducted."

"And you have seen her since? You know where she is—with these road-agents?"

Dilapidated Dan explained where he had seen Nellie.

Fawn-eyed Fan got up and left her father with an agitation she could not repress. For a long time she stood outside the cabin thinking. Then, as pale as death, she went indoors, passed through the room where Dan still sat, and entered another, where she found George Bashford just roused from a refreshing sleep.

"Miss Farnsworth has been found," she told him. "My father is in the outer room, and will lead Judge Starkey to her rescue."

George Bashford leaped upright in bed.

"Nellie Farnsworth found!" he cried. "Excuse me, Miss Davenant—I must dress at once! Will you please to send your father to me?"

Not a word of surprise at her having a father! He had but one thought—Nellie Farnsworth!

With a compression of her lips Fawn-eyed Fan withdrew and sent Dilapidated Dan in to George.

"You," was George's somewhat uncomplimentary salute.

Then followed explanations that made Bashford apologize for his suspicions, and promise unlimited reward in addition to undying gratitude to the old bummer; while in the outer room Fawn-eyed Fan sat with her head bowed to her knees.

That night Josh Starkey reached the camp with a formidable following of men, who were resolved to "rub out" the entire road-agent band.

In the morning they set out, guided by Dilapidated Dan, to secure Nellie Farnsworth before they made their descent upon the bandits.

George Bashford, pale but resolute, rode beside Josh Starkey.

Ah! he knew nothing of a woman who laid her cheek upon the pillow his head had pressed, and wept!

CHAPTER XXXIX.

AT BAY!

AT the mouth of the corridor stood Barbara Musgrave in her dress of the Dumb Bandit. It was as if she put off her womanhood with her change of garments.

Her face was transfigured. Its pallor was gray, with a livid circle about the mouth. The eyes blazed with a terrible, set glare. The bloodless lips twitched and worked nervously. The pinched nostrils quivered. Never was human countenance stamped with a more intense look of murderous fury.

Behind her, with one extended hand, she restrained Boss Kane at the head of the bandit horde.

His wolfish face glowed with demoniac triumph. When he first broached the subject of Tiger Dick's untruth, he had nearly lost his life in Barbara's outburst of wifely indignation. But the name of Nellie Farnsworth had fallen upon her like an icy chill; she had listened, and become convinced.

Then she had donned the dress she had supposed foregone forever, called her men together, sworn them anew to their allegiance, and led them forth they knew not on what errand.

So this was Boss Kane's hour of triumph.

What he now gloated on was the spectacle of Tiger Dick standing as grand, as beautiful, as some fallen angel, facing destruction without the quailing of a nerve.

Behind him, where he had swept her out of danger, Nellie Farnsworth lay in a swoon.

The Indian woman stood in the mouth of a corridor leading from the chamber, as motionless as a statue, her black eyes glittering, her face as impassive as bronze.

The firelight illuminated all with Rembrandt effect, during a moment of hush and suspended activity.

Then Barbara Musgrave's voice seemed to cleave the stillness like a trenchant blade.

"Seize the traitor!" she fairly hissed.

"Forward!" shouted Boss Kane, and darted toward his intended prisoner like a hound with slipped leash.

Then there was an awful moment while Tiger Dick's weapons blazed incessantly; while the chamber re-echoed with shouts and groans and curses; while the air eddied with smoke and dust; while the struggling men, the ruddy firelight and the black shadows made the place look like a veritable Pandemonium.

Order was at last resolved out of chaos.

Tiger Dick was bound hand and foot. His clothes were torn; he was covered with blood and dirt. He had made no tame resistance as the dead and wounded testified.

But when he had shaken his hair out of his eyes, he smiled at his captors, the same cool Tiger Dick.

"Well, gentlemen, we seem to have had a pleasant time all round," he said.

Boss Kane, who was nursing a painful wound, glared at his captive.

"We'll make it pleasant enough for you, before we git through with you," he growled, with an oath.

Barbara Musgrave passed her recreant husband without a glance, and glared down at innocent Nellie Farnsworth.

"Ever the same contemptible weakness!" she muttered, scarcely able to restrain the impulse to spit in the face of her unconscious rival.

Then something like a sob of rage shook her breast as she went on:

"His daughter! It is my retribution! Ah, father! why did I forget your mission?—why did I barter your revenge for this passion that has stung me at the last? But now—*God being my witness!*—I will crush them all together!"

She called Boss Kane aside and commanded:

"Detail as many men as are necessary to raid Freeze-out Camp, and bring away Jim Farnsworth—*dead or alive!*"

This accorded well with Boss Kane's natural cruelty and vengefulness.

Tiger Dick was led forth a prisoner, the woman who had loved him so passionately now avoiding him. The wrong he had done her had clef clear down into her heart of hearts. She was hardening herself for a terrible revenge.

He walked like a conquered king. He would have scorned to make an effort to placate his wife. As he loved Nellie, he now hated Barbara.

Nellie, poor soul, having been restored to consciousness that was a renewal of agony, was borne forth drooping like a broken lily. She, who had injured nobody, was tossed back and forth like a shuttlecock between her enemies.

Barbara did not speak to her rival. Only the fierce glitter of her eyes told her murderous hatred.

The Indian woman was not interfered with beyond some dark scowls from the bandits. She regarded the intruders with the lofty scorn peculiar to her race.

So they issued from the cave.

At a little distance, while they were defiling through a narrow ravine, a rapid fire was opened upon them from above.

Boss Kane, the first hit, was toppled mortally wounded from his horse.

"That to you, traitor!" shouted the voice of Shadow Jim.

Then his blazing weapons unhorsed all those in Tiger Dick's immediate vicinity.

The rescue was well planned. In the confusion that ensued Tiger Dick might have escaped, but that Boss Kane, resolved to leave no precaution neglected, had had him securely bound to his horse.

Barbara Musgrave saw the assailant, and, putting this and that together, arrived very nearly at the truth. Evidently Shadow Jim had betrayed her and was in collusion with her false husband. He must have led Dick to Nellie Farnsworth. For that act Barbara hated him sufficiently to burn him at the stake, could she but catch him.

"Follow me!" she shouted to a squad of her men. "That traitor must be taken if all else is lost!"

And, spurring her horse until the animal shrieked with pain and anger, she scrambled up the slope in pursuit of Shadow Jim.

But the wary Jim, having done all he could for his principal, now looked out for "number one."

A moment later the ravine was a scene of terrific warfare.

"No quarter!" shouted the stentorian voice of Josh Starkey.

Then the mad carnival of death burst in all its fury.

This encounter was unexpected, yet none the less welcome to the allies. The men of Freeze-out Camp fought to wipe out the insult that the insolent bandit had put upon them.

In the van charged George Bashford, striking giant blows, yet searching with the eye of love for one figure.

He saw her at last, and disregarding the hail of death through which he rode, spurred to her side.

"Nellie, my darling!" he shouted, forgetting that no word of love had passed between them as yet.

And she, equally remembering only her heart, extended her arms to him, to be received into his embrace, while she murmured:

"Oh, George! George!"

One there was who raged through that battle like a demon. Diverted from her pursuit of Shadow Jim by the sound of conflict, Barbara had plunged again into the ravine, to make a desperate yet hopeless struggle against fate.

Now all the terrible possibilities of the woman's passionate nature were aroused. She saw the ruin of all her life's purposes. With the destruction of her band of road agents—and it seemed as if not one could escape that death-trap—farewell her revenge against her father's murderer!—farewell the punishment she had planned against her traitor husband!

That frenzy of rage which before had seized her, when defending her father and lover against fearful odds, now reappeared. Brave men fled before the terrible onslaught of the Dumb Bandit—dumb no longer; for her despairing fury now vented itself in hoarse cries, rallying her followers, or execrating her foes.

But all was vain!

When she saw that defeat was inevitable, her fierce jealousy prompted a blow at her rival, and she urged her horse toward the lovers who, engrossed in each other in the first blissful moment of reunion, were off their guard.

At that moment George, roused to the necessity of getting his love out of that rain of bullets, looked about for some avenue of escape, and saw the fury approaching.

Barbara's pistols were long since emptied. She clutched a slender bladed dagger. As she reached Nellie's side, she made a terrible lunge with it at the girl's heart.

But George, with one motion, clutched her wrist and whirled his lady-love out of harm's way.

Others, too, saw Nellie Farnsworth's peril—among them the Rev. Giles Goddard and Judge Starkey; so that there was a rush toward this common center.

At that instant Barbara's horse reared with a scream of pain, and fell headlong to the ground.

Half stunned and blinded with dust, she struggled to her feet, dashed the tangled hair from her eyes, and faced them all at bay.

Her sombrero had been torn off, carrying with it the silk handkerchief that bound her head, thus releasing her long, raven tresses and betraying her sex. Her dagger too had been dashed from her hand and lost.

"Hold!" shouted the Rev. Giles Goddard. "It is a woman! Take her prisoner. She must not be harmed."

"Good God!" cried Josh Starkey. "It's Jack Musgrave's daughter!"

She turned her white face, traced by little rills of crimson, and flashed her blazing eyes upon him. Her hands were clinched, her teeth set, her bosom panting.

In that moment of utter defeat it seemed to this half-crazed creature as if her heart would burst. Her woman's strength had failed. For the first time in her life she was conquered—that complete overthrow of the spirit that leaves the will prostrate. It came upon her with crushing force, bringing a frenzy of fear, something akin to a stage fright; and losing all self-possession, she cried, wildly:—

"Father! Father!"

There came an answering cry, a mad rush, a surge of the crowd as of a tempestuous sea, and the spot was enveloped in a cloud of dust!

CHAPTER XL.

A LIFE FOR A LIFE.

It was the last charge of the Free Rangers of the Sierras to the rescue of their queen.

Into the mad surge of battle had dashed one whose dauntless courage marked him for leadership. At his rallying cry, the robbers forgot to wonder that it was the half-breed, Pedro, who had so recently attempted the life of the very person he was now rushing upon almost certain death to rescue.

They did not know that his vengeful soul kept ringing with the thought:—

"She must not die save by my hand! Look you, oh, betrayed one! I will yet avenge thee!"

They only heard him cry:—

"Rally! Rangers, rally! Rescue for our chief!"

Then they charged. The cordon which hemmed in the baffled woman was broken. Her enemies were for the moment pressed back.

Some one leaped to the ground beside her.

"Mount!" cried a voice.

The horse was held in readiness.

She looked up and recognized Pedro. She did not stop to question why he was now befriending her. She leaped into the saddle.

Then the tide of battle flowed back!

There was a helter-skelter retreat; a headlong pursuit; a running fight which kept thinning out until the last shot was fired.

The allies held the field.

Then came care for the wounded, friend and foe; burial for the dead; and, last, the summing up of losses and mourning for the brave fellows who had purchased victory with their life's blood.

The road-agent band was a thing of the past. Four-fifths of their number lay dead or wounded in that gore-seeking ravine.

Boss Kane had received his death from the hand of Shadow Jim.

The Dumb Bandit—now known as Jack Musgrave's daughter—had escaped.

The half-breed, Pedro, had disappeared as suddenly as he had burst upon the scene.

Tiger Dick, still a prisoner, had only exchanged captors. He smiled serenely. The fortunes of war were to him but moves in an exhilarating game, with life at stake.

Several of the band, who had been taken prisoners and were reserved for the rope, lay bound, scowling black and sullen.

Of the allies many were wounded—some were dead.

After an extended search, one was given up as missing—no less a character than Dilapidated Dan. Many still doubted his honesty. A detected spy of the road-agents, he might have purchased his life by betraying Nellie Farnsworth's place of concealment.

George Bashford had his love at last. That first moment of reunion had told them all. He recounted all that he had suffered for her, and she shyly admitted that he had never been out of her thoughts.

When told that her father lay wounded, yet convalescent—indeed, nearly well—in Freeze-out Camp, she could scarcely content herself to wait during the night it was necessary to camp near the scene of battle, in order to take proper care of those who had suffered in the fight.

When, on the following morning, the allies, crowned with victory, rode into camp, George took her directly to the dearly-loved father, to be locked in his embrace, he learning of her danger only now when she was restored to him.

Ah! that was a happy time!

The first thing that the Rev. Giles Goddard learned, on his return, was that Fawn-eyed Fan had disappeared from the Camp! He knew that she had not had the courage to await George Bashford's return, happy in the smiles of her rival. No doubt Dilapidated Dan had returned during the night and told her of the victory, and they had fled together.

In front of Fandango Hall stood seven horses abreast.

Each bore a rider with his hands tied behind his back.

The neck of each rider was encircled by a running noose.

The other end of each rope was fastened to the limb of a tree directly overhead.

At the head of each horse stood a man holding the bits; at the flank a man with a drawn bowie, ready to prod the tender flesh.

On three sides this strange group was surrounded by a crowd of eager spectators; before them a clear space stretched up the mountain.

"Ready!" shouted Judge Starkey.

"Ready she am!" responded the men at the heads of the horses.

"Go!"

"Go!" went all along the line.

The men before the horses sprung away. Those at the flanks prodded with their bowies. The crowd yelled. The horses dashed away, leaving their late riders dangling beneath their respective trees.

But now a strange phenomenon dropped the

jaws and opened the eyes of the astonished votaries of Lynch law.

One of the men whom they expected to see dangling between heaven and earth was borne from the midst on the back of his magnificent horse, at the rate of about a mile in a minute and twenty seconds! No Derby heat ever started with a wilder dash. On the wings of the wind, their prisoner was escaping them!

That prisoner was Tiger Dick!

They stared after the flying horse and rider—then at the limb of the tree, from which depended about a foot of oscillating rope-end—then again after the rapidly receding prisoner.

In that last glance they made another astonishing discovery.

Tiger Dick was not riding alone!

Beside him galloped another, who carried in his left hand a small carbine, while with his right he drew a bowie-knife and cut the Tiger's wrists asunder with a skillful slash.

But more than this—the rescuer was the Dumb Bandit!

Then the marvel was explained.

Forgetting all but her love for him, Barbara Musgrave made a last effort to release from the clutches of his enemies the man who had wronged her as only a man could. The yell of the crowd had drowned the report of her carbine, the bullet from which had at the very last moment cut the rope which was to hang Tiger Dick. Now she was beside him once more with but one thought in her heart. The past might be redeemed. Surely this devotion must win his fickle love. She heard the yells of rage with which their outwitted enemies set out in pursuit of them. She laughed at them in the lightness of her heart.

But now an enemy sprung up in front of them. It was Pedro, the half-breed. His eyes blazed with malignant hatred and triumph.

"Now Anselmo look down on me!" he cried.

Then, from both revolvers, he poured a hail of bullets into the very faces of the fugitives.

Tiger Dick continued to ride like a centaur, but his wife and rescuer—she whose bold and skillful hand had plucked him from the very jaws of death—swayed in her saddle, clutched wildly at the air, and gasped:

"Dick—I'm—done for!"

A spasmodic gripe of the stiffening fingers, an agonized contortion of the features, a vain essay to speak further, a bone-searching shudder, and Barbara Musgrave seemed to collapse.

But she did not fall from the saddle. Tiger Dick's arm was about her. Supporting her lifeless form with his left arm he caught the flying bridle-rein of her horse with his right hand, and kept the animal close beside his own.

So they sped together far into the mountain fastnesses until beyond the reach of enemies.

In a secluded glade, with peaks towering to the sky on every hand and sentinel pines standing round, the whole bathed in silver moonlight, Tiger Dick knelt beside the woman who had proved faithful to the last—who had purchased his life with her own.

"It was fate, Dick," she whispered, in the interval of consciousness to which he had restored her. "I loved you too well—so well that I forgot my father's mission."

"Hold my hand tight, Dick!"

"Kiss me, dear!"

"There!"

"Ah!"

A cloud obscured the moon.

In the darkness Tiger Dick knelt—alone!

An interval of a year.

A terrible scourge is decimating San Francisco.

A woman in the plain dress of a nurse is leaning against the whitewashed wall of a hospital. Her head hangs upon her breast. Her cheeks are scarlet. Tears course down her cheeks.

A man has possessed himself of both her hands. He is gazing at her earnestly.

"Me!" she says—"can you take me?"

"And thank God for the blessing!" he responds.

The man is the Rev. Giles Goddard!

The woman—ah, how her beauty has been purified by suffering and repentance!—the woman is Fawn-eyed Fan!

THE END.

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